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**THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF KOREAN
REUNIFICATION: POPULATION MIGRATION,
SOCIAL INTEGRATION, AND DISCRIMINATION**

by

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June 2019

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**THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF KOREAN REUNIFICATION:
POPULATION MIGRATION, SOCIAL INTEGRATION, AND
DISCRIMINATION**

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ABSTRACT

Existing literature on the topic of a potential Korean reunification focuses primarily on three major areas of concern: the impact to regional and international security, fiscal costs analysis, and anticipation of various reunification scenarios. Assuming a unification under Seoul's guidance, this thesis will seek to bridge a gap that exists in the field by examining the likely social implications of reunification on the Korean peninsula. It will argue that despite the similarities in culture, language, historical legacies, and ethnic roots, two particular sets of social issues—population migration and social discrimination—will prove to be more divisive and socially costly than those similar issues experienced in the aftermath of the German reunification. This thesis will conclude that seven decades of separation has created two vastly contradictory and incompatible Korean societies that will make the social integration of the two Koreas as sensitive, challenging, and complex as the more often debated security and economic repercussions. As such, the potential social implications should be discussed on an equal footing with security and economic consequences of the Korean reunification.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|---|
| 3D | dirty, difficult, and dangerous |
| CR | Capital Region |
| DCNKHR | Database Center for North Korean Human Rights |
| DMZ | demilitarized zone |
| DPRK | Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) |
| FRG | Federal Republic of Germany (former West Germany) |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GDR | German Democratic Republic (former East Germany) |
| IEO | inequality in education opportunity |
| NIS | National Intelligence Service |
| OECD | The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| ROK | Republic of Korea (South Korea) |
| SME | small and microenterprises |

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the historic meeting between the two Korean leaders in April 2018 and the subsequent signing of the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula, the prospect of Korean reunification has resurfaced as a topical issue of interest for the international community. Existing studies have thoroughly investigated the potential security and economic implications in preparation for such an event. As such, the current literature on the Korean reunification focuses primarily on three major areas of concern: security, both international and domestic; economic costs and breakdowns; and analysis of various reunification scenarios, with a majority of scholars assuming a scenario in which the capitalist South absorbs the communist North. Yet, analysis of social implications, as it relates to integrating two very contradictory societies with mutually exclusive interests, is scant. Thus, to ensure adequate and well-rounded preparation on the social front, the potential social integration issues of Korean reunification merits further analysis.

This thesis seeks to bridge a gap that exists in the field by examining the social implications of a potential Korean reunification and highlighting possible, yet highly likely, social integration issues that will surface whilst reuniting the two Korean societies. The thesis argues that despite the similarities in culture, language, historical legacies, and ethnic roots, the repercussions of two particular sets of social issues—population migration and social discrimination—will prove to be more divisive and socially costly than those similar issues experienced in the aftermath of the German reunification. Though this thesis does not seek to provide a policy prescription nor suggest that South Korea should or should not pursue unification in the future, it does argue that understanding the nature and severity of the social integration challenges posed by the possible unification is crucial not only to anticipating and preparing for the challenges themselves, but also because these issues affect how and whether both Koreas, the South in particular, pursue unification in the first place.

Knowing how differently the two societies have evolved since the end of the Korean War, it is not much of a surprise that the general consensus in literature suggests a

“drab future” for the North Koreans who must come to terms with their outdated and obsolete skill sets, and face diminished social status after the reunification.¹ Much social discrimination is likely to stem from two major perceptions: first, the southern bias that the North Koreans are uncultured, uneducated, and inferior; second, the Northerners’ disdain for South Korea’s materialistic and superficial culture, in which it has become the norm for appearances and wealth to inform societal relations and statuses.

The relationship between the two Koreas has been episodic at best, and seven decades of separation has created two vastly divergent and incompatible societies. On average, South Koreans are fifteen times more prosperous than their northern counterparts.² While South Korea successfully democratized and now consistently ranks among the world’s top 15 economies, North Korea occupies a seat among the world’s poorest nations, and is one of the most socially, politically, and technologically isolated nations in the world. For these reasons, the Korean reunification will be unlike any other reunifications we have seen and studied in the past. However, among the examples of past reunifications, lessons can certainly be drawn from Germany’s shortcomings and tailored to suit the needs of the Korean reunification. Thus, this thesis will frequently reference examples from Germany’s social integration experience as an underpinning touchstone for the potential Korean reunification.

The German example shows that social integration issues are difficult, important, and longer-lasting than often expected. Almost three decades post-German reunification, “a phantom wall still stands” with East Germany’s [Gross Domestic Product] GDP only 70% that of the west, its unemployment rate almost double that of West Germany, and the salaries of its workers, on average, 20% lower than that of West German workers.³ A recent study conducted by the Berlin Institute for Population and Development concluded that 50% of Germans believe there are more differences than commonalities between the

¹ Andrei Lankov, “Post-Unification, a Drab Future for North(Ern) Koreans,” *North Korea News*, November 2, 2015, www.nknews.org/2015/11/post-unification-a-drab-future-for-northern-koreans/.

² Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 402.

³ Katie Engelhart, “A Divided Germany, Decades After the Wall,” *Rogers Digital Media*, May 25, 2014, <https://www.macleans.ca/politics/worldpolitics/a-divided-germany-decades-after-the-wall/>.

“Ossis” (Easterners) and “Wessis” (Westerners).⁴ Furthermore, there has been a growing trend in western impatience with sending US\$3 trillion dollars in subsidies and welfare eastward since the reunification, which has contributed to a pattern of eastern resentment over the west’s continued and unequal prosperity. If the German reunification serves as an example for the Korean reunification, then the consideration of the potential social implications warrants further analysis, thus partly explaining why the former-East and West societies are still functioning in parallel almost three decades after the German reunification.⁵

But Germany also differs from the Koreas in important ways: East and West Germany maintained a porous border with frequent and reliable lines of communication; the two were separated half the amount of time that the Koreas have now been split; and neither were involved in a protracted war in which the East committed a series of human rights violations. On the other hand, the Koreas have diverged so drastically that South Korea’s economy is now roughly 30–40 times that of North Korea. The income gap between the north and south is much bigger than Germany’s ever was, the hostility between the two much more direct and aggressive, and the free flow of information and communication practically non-existent.

The Korean reunification will almost certainly be a messy, costly, and exhausting endeavor that will test the social fabric of the two Korean societies. The pre-famine period in which South Koreans viewed North Korean defectors as high value assets with political utility is over.⁶ According to Andrei Lankov, South Korean society no longer supports either mass defection of North Koreans and their subsequent influx into South Korea or wishes to “sacrifice their hard-won prosperity for the sake of [North Koreans] who,

⁴ Kate Connolly, “German Reunification 25 Years On: How Different Are East and West Really?” *Guardian*, October 2, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/02/german-reunification-25-years-on-how-different-are-east-and-west-really>.

⁵ Marta Zawilska-Florczuk and Artur Ciecchanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies? Germany Twenty Years After Reunification,” trans. Ilona Duchnowicz and Nicholas Furnival, *Osrodek Studiow Wschodnich Im Marka Karpia Centre for Eastern Studies*, no. 35 (February 2011): 16. https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace_35_en_0.pdf.

⁶ Andrei Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise: North Korean Refugees in South Korea,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 2006): 107, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1598240800000059>.

whatever the Republic of Korea constitution says, clearly belong to another and rather hostile state.”⁷ Potentially burdensome social integration issues have caused a noticeable shift in South Korean public opinion toward wariness of unification, surely impacting the likelihood of it even happening in the first place. As such, it is prudent to start the discussion now, and to attempt to predict the major social issues and concerns, to ensure a peaceful merger of the two Korean societies.

The South Korean government currently funds and oversees a compulsory 12-week re-settlement program aimed at easing the defectors’ transition into South Korean society. The Republic of Korea (ROK) government also provides an initial lump-sum re-settlement stipend and offers all newly arrived refugees low-cost public housing. Additionally, the defectors are entitled to welfare, unemployment benefits, and other cash incentives during their adjustment period.⁸ While at first glance this seems rather generous and far-reaching, the current social integration measures and governmental policies are meant to serve the roughly 30,000 North Korean defectors presently living in South Korea, and are in no way ready for the full integration of the two Korean societies.⁹ The degree to which South Korean policymakers are willing, dealing, and preparing for the potential social blowback of reunification is beyond the scope of this research. However, in the event of Korean reunification, implications from social integration will suddenly become a priority. Under this kind of pressure, we might expect the South Korean government to develop policies that are more crisis driven. In that case, existing social problems could worsen with an influx of more northern migrants, or problems could get better since more urgency and pressure will be placed on resolving defector issues. This thesis assumes that whatever social issues exists now will only become worse post-reunification. For this reason, this thesis fundamentally aligns with the pessimistic views of Lankov and Eberstadt who

⁷ Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise,” 114.

⁸ For supplemental information regarding *jeongchakkeum* (settlement money/payout), see Seo Yeon Park, “Street-Level Bureaucracy and Depoliticized North Korean Subjectivity in the Service Provision of Hana Center,” *Asian Ethnicity* 17, no. 2 (February 2016): 199–213, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2016.1151231>; also see Andrei Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise: North Korean Refugees in South Korea,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 2006): 118.

⁹ Park, “Street-Level Bureaucracy and Depoliticized North Korean Subjectivity,” 203–209.

contend that social integration of North and South Koreans will be difficult, competitive, disappointing, and challenging.¹⁰

In analyzing the various social implications, this thesis employs evidence drawn from qualitative analysis of scholarly literature, as well as open source reporting from Korean media outlets, which offer particularly perceptive insights into the thoughts of average North and South Koreans. The thesis also relies on video recordings, interviews, and articles of North Korean defector experiences, as well as surveys, polling data, and other empirical evidence from Korean research databases. Both Korean and English sources were used in this research, and translations, unless otherwise noted, were done by the author. Empirical evidence and quantifiable data were cited when applicable, but it also makes logical sense, particularly when discussing potential social discrimination challenges that are not easily quantifiable, to rely on first-hand defector accounts and testimonies as current North Korean defectors residing in South Korea are reflective of much of the segment of the North Korean population most likely to migrate south upon reunification (i.e., larger proportion of poorer, economically motivated North Koreans with little political utility). Thus, “by examining specific issues that the defectors face in adjusting to life in South Korea, one can project the problems a unified Korea might encounter” as defector experiences shed light on existing social issues that could worsen with complete social integration.¹¹

To the extent that this thesis discusses the social implications of a potential Korean reunification, a certain amount of estimations and conclusions are drawn by analyzing existing trends and taking into account the German example. While this thesis does not assume that all North Koreans will migrate to South Korea upon reunification, nor that those who do migrate south will be as deeply integrated into the South Korean society as many of the defectors are now, we can expect that the social issues between North and

¹⁰ Nicholas Eberstadt and Judith Banister, “Divided Korea: Demographic and Socioeconomic Issues for Reunification,” *Population and Development Review* 18, no. 3 (September 1992): 505–31. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1973656>.

¹¹ Tara O, “The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea: Problems and Prospects,” *International Journal of Korean Studies* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 152, http://www.icks.org/data/ijks/1482460255_add_file_7.pdf.

South Koreans will persist, given that similar issues arose in Germany, and there is evidence to confidently suggest that seven decades of separation has created two vastly contradictory and irreconcilable Korean societies. Thus, looking at current defector experiences sheds much insight into what is to come in the event of reunification, and gives good reason to extrapolate that existing negative trends in infrastructure limitations, socio-spatial inequalities, and discrimination will only worsen with more North Koreans living in South Korea. Again, this assumption warrants emphasizing because some analysts might hold that the crisis-driven urgency surrounding unification might lead us not to extrapolate from current conditions.

This thesis is organized to analyze the social implications of a potential Korean reunification from a South Korean perspective. While the North Korean perspective is briefly considered in the conclusion, the bulk of this research approaches social integration from a South Korean viewpoint due to the scarcity of credible and verifiable primary and secondary sources from North Korea.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter II explains the strongest rationale for the Korean reunification: shared ethnic identity. It reviews the ethnic historicity that unites North and South Koreans in a single ethnic identity, defines preconditions for being Korean, and highlights the evolution of intra-South Korean national identity, which is undergoing significant changes, particularly among the younger generations. In doing so, Chapter II seeks to debunk the prevalent “blood-bound notion” of ethnic unity that is often “expected to function as a unifying force across a divided system.”¹²

Chapter III examines the North-South migration and population movement that is expected in a unified Korea. This migration flow is further sub-analyzed with regard to shifts in motivations for defection, growth of the labor crowding effect, and exacerbation of infrastructure limitations and socio-spatial inequality. Chapter III outlines the myriad of social complications that will arise when North Koreans crowd South Korea’s already competitive labor market; compete for basic and critical government services, limited

¹² Gi Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 164.

housing, and schools; and demand more from an already over-stretched South Korean infrastructure.

Chapter IV explores social discrimination and the probable emergence of a class system, analyzed in the context of the split of pan-Korean nationalism into two factions of South Korean “Us” and North Korean “Them.” It examines the reasons behind the growing social distance between North and South Koreans, and notes differences between northern and southern cultural and societal values. Chapter IV also addresses the potential social discrimination challenges that the North Korean defectors will face when assimilating into a vastly different southern society, and argues that social integration will come with an underlying layer of discrimination and classification of North Koreans as “second class citizens who form a new minority group in the South Korean society.”¹³

Chapter V briefly examines social issues from a North Korean perspective in the event of a South-North migration. Considering North Korea’s highly lucrative reserve of rare earth minerals, Chapter V considers the potential benefits of northern migration by South Korean migrants, while also addressing the Northerners’ vulnerability to exploitation through the emergence of “carpetbagging” behavior among opportunistic southern capitalists.

Finally, Chapter VI will conclude that the premise of shared ethnic homogeneity as the driving force for the Korean unification offers a false sense of unity. Among other concerns, the social fallout from mass southern migration by North Korean refugees and the subsequent issues raised by the worsening labor market and growing social discrimination should give us reason to question any blind push by North and South Korean governments towards the reunification of the Korean peninsula.

¹³ Jih Un Kim and Dong Jin Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers? The Status and Perception of North Korean Refugees in South Korea,” *Asian Perspective* 31, no. 2 (2007): 6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42704587>.

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II. DEBUNKING SHARED ETHNIC UNITY

According to Shin, “ethnic unity or its perception [is] expected to function as a unifying force across a divided system.”¹⁴ In this regard, the strongest, and the most compelling rationale for the Korean unification is the shared ethnic identity between North and South Koreans.¹⁵ Despite the South Korean government’s use of these shared ethnic ties as the foundation for its push towards reunification, Lankov notes that the “recent years have seen a dramatic but not always openly stated change in the official South Korean attitude toward defectors; from a policy explicitly aimed at encouraging defection, Seoul has moved to the policy of quietly discouraging it.”¹⁶ There are two possible explanations for this change in southern attitudes. The first is the fear that openly encouraging defection will undermine South Korea’s policy of peaceful unification, and destroy what little goodwill remains between the two countries. The second reason, and the focus of this thesis, is the perception that North Koreans are outsiders, “not quite adjustable to the conditions of South Korean society and thus a social and budgetary burden” on South Korea.¹⁷ In order to further unpack this negative perception of North Koreans as social and economic burdens, this chapter first explores the historicity of the shared ethnic identity between North and South Koreans. It then examines how civic identity is gradually replacing ethnic identity as the determinant factor in what it means to be Korean, thus challenging the foundational ethnic rationale upon which the narrative for unification is built.

A. ETHNIC HISTORICITY

A piece of folklore shared by both North and South Koreans called *Dangun* unites the two groups in a single ethnic identity. *Dangun*, the son of a God and a human mother,

¹⁴ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 164.

¹⁵ Ji Yoon Kim, *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies (Washington, D.C.: Korea Economic Institute of America, 2014), 97, http://www.keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/jiyoonyoon_kim.pdf.

¹⁶ Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise,” 1.

¹⁷ Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise,” 1.

is credited with creating the Korean race and ruling the Kingdom of *Gojoseon*, a powerful kingdom that consolidated smaller peripheral states to become one of the largest, most advanced ancient empires of its time. According to Kim, this myth “epitomizes the ethnic identity shared by the Korean people, both North and South.”¹⁸ Others, like Shin, argue that the Korean national identity is a relatively new concept that developed in response to Japanese colonialism in the early 1900s.¹⁹ Regardless, whether it is a mythical tale or shared anti-Japanese sentiments, Koreans on both sides of the border share a strong emphasis on ethnic unity (*minjok*) and historical bloodlines. Thus, it is important to note that this shared ethnic lineage forms the cornerstone of what little link remains between North and South Korea since the partition.

B. DEFINING “KOREANNESS”

In 2013, the ASAN Institute for Policy Studies published the results of a survey in which the South Korean public (a sample of 1000 people) was asked questions regarding the Korean national identity and the South Korean attitude towards North Korea. First, preconditions for “Koreanness,” or how Korean a person is, were separated into two components: an ethnic component and a civic component. The three ethnic components were (1) “being born in Korea,” (2) “having the Korean bloodline,” and (3) “living in Korea for most of one’s life”; the four civic components were (1) “maintaining Korean nationality,” (2) “being able to speak and write in Korean,” (3) “abiding by the Korean political and legal system,” and (4) “understanding Korean traditions.”²⁰ Respondents were asked to categorize each of the above preconditions or components as either important or not important as the benchmark for one’s Koreanness.

The problem, however, is that the results of the ASAN survey revealed that South Korea’s national identity has and still is undergoing significant changes particularly among the younger generations. The survey results indicate that South Koreans as a whole consider civic identity more important than ethnic identity in determining one’s

¹⁸ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 97.

¹⁹ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 97.

²⁰ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 98–100.

“Koreanness.” That is, civic identity is the yardstick by which South Koreans measure how “Korean” a person is. Moreover, as Kang and Lee write in support of the survey results, though “Korean nationalism has been maintained by an ethnic myth for a long period,” this ethnic-oriented Korean nationalism is being challenged due to the changing demographics and the evolution of Korea’s national identity.²¹ Given that the “current discourse and policy on unification is based on the premise that Korea will be unified since it is an ethnically homogenous nation,”²² if ethnic nationalism fades, then the sense of ethnic unity between the two Koreas will become much weaker, thus undermining the main reason for unifying the peninsula in the first place.

When asked if being born in Korea, having a Korean bloodline, or living in Korea for the majority of one’s life was an important factor in defining a person’s “Koreanness,” 69%, 65.8%, and 66.1% of the respondents, respectively, responded “yes.”²³ When asked about the civic components—whether maintaining a Korean nationality, being able to speak and write Korean, abiding by the Korean political and legal system, or understanding Korean traditions was an important precondition in determining how Korean a person is—88.4%, 91.7%, 93.4%, and 91.5% of the respondents, respectively, replied “yes.”²⁴ The results of this survey signaled a noticeable shift in what was once considered by South Koreans to be indispensable conditions of ethnic nationalism—being born in Korea, having a Korean bloodline, and maintaining primary residence in Korea. On this point, Kim concludes that “it is apparent that South Koreans’ national identity is undergoing a significant change. Once heavily centered on ethnic identity, it is now moving toward civic identity.”²⁵ Table 1 summarizes the survey responses.

²¹ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 97.

²² Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 20.

²³ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 99.

²⁴ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 99.

²⁵ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 100.

Table 1. Preconditions for “Koreanness”²⁶

| Ethnic Component | | |
|---|-----------|---------------|
| | Important | Not Important |
| Being born in Korea | 69.0% | 27.9% |
| Having a Korean bloodline | 65.8% | 30.4% |
| Living in Korea for most of one’s life | 66.1% | 30.2% |
| Civic Component | | |
| | Important | Not Important |
| Maintaining Korean nationality (i.e. citizenship) | 88.4% | 9.1% |
| Being able to speak and write Korean | 91.7% | 6.7% |
| Abiding by the Korean political and legal systems | 93.4% | 4.2% |
| Understanding Korean traditions | 91.5% | 6.1% |

When the survey results were further subdivided by age groups, ethnic identity was less important to the younger generation than it was to the older generation, by and large. Whereas only 56.5% of those in their 20s saw being born in Korea as a precondition for being Korean, 88.1% of those 60s and older thought that a Korean must be born in Korea.²⁷ Similarly, while just 56.9% of South Koreans in their 20s believed a person should have a Korean bloodline to be considered Korean, 87.2% of those 60 and over saw having Korean blood as a necessary trait of a Korean.²⁸

Examining the components of civic identity further, North Korean defectors are automatically granted South Korean citizenships upon registering as a South Korean resident. In order to claim residency, all defectors are first screened and interviewed by the National Intelligence Service (NIS) to verify their claim as refugees, and confirm that they pose no security threat. After completing the screening process, the refugees enter Hanawon, a 12-week re-settlement support program funded and regulated by the ROK government. Here, North Korean defectors are taught educational courses, which include

²⁶ Adapted from Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 99–100.

²⁷ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 100.

²⁸ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 100.

“basic vocational training, lectures about Korean history and democracy, the concept of a market economy, as well as psychological counseling, career aptitude test, and health check-ups.”²⁹ When the twelve weeks are up, each defector is assigned a “re-settlement counselor/helper” for two years to serve as a guide through South Korean society and assist with personal and professional needs. Thus, under the current law, all North Korean refugees entering South Korea post-unification would effectively become South Korean citizens, hence meeting the first civic identity criterion that a Korean must maintain a Korean nationality (i.e., citizenship). Secondly, as Koreans on both sides of the border share the same language, albeit with regional accent differences, the second criterion—being able to speak and write Korean—is also met without much concern.

The third precondition may be the most challenging for the North Korean refugees to meet: abiding by the Korean political and legal systems. Understandably, having just escaped one of the most repressive regimes in the world, North Koreans conditioned under *juche* ideology and indoctrinated into the Kim Dynasty’s personality cult will likely find adjustment to South Korean politics and legal system difficult and shocking. Not only will they have a hard time comprehending and partaking in democratic politics like campaigning and voting, but South Korea’s frequent grass-root, bottom-up social mobilization efforts that are devoid of propaganda and not government imposed, such as those that successfully impeached President Park Geun Hye in 2017, will also seem foreign and perplexing. To add to the confusion, a functioning law enforcement and judiciary system that does not simultaneously serve as a political loyalty/neighborhood watch mechanism will take some time to adjust to and trust. However, it is perfectly reasonable to anticipate that over time, as the North Korean refugees realize that South Korea’s political and legal systems function to serve its people and allow for greater freedoms, they will begin to adjust, conform, and trust South Korea’s political and legal systems.

Finally, as Koreans on both sides of the border share similar culture, history, food, and traditions, it will not be too difficult for the North Korean refugees to meet the fourth

²⁹ Ji Young Sung and Myung Hyun Go, *Resettling in South Korea: Challenges for Young North Korean Refugees* (Seoul, Korea: The ASAN Institute for Policy Studies, August 8, 2014), 2, <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/resettling-in-south-korea-challenges-for-young-north-korean-refugees/>.

criterion of understanding Korean traditions. Thus, by all accounts, even if South Korean national identity is shaped by civic components, not ethnic, North Korean refugees should be able to meet these preconditions and seamlessly assimilate into the South Korean society. Yet, discrimination against North Korean defectors and their exclusion from mainstream southern society is rather deeply rooted. Kim concurs and emphasizes this:

Many believe that South Korea welcomes North Korean defectors with open arms, taking satisfaction that the oppressive North Korean regime is the reason for escape, and feeling above all, that the defectors share the same Koreanness ethnically, which is the reason for tendering citizenship as soon as they arrive in South Korea. Nonetheless, that underlying principle that “we” share the same ethnic origin and unconditionally accept the newcomers appears to be under transformation.³⁰

To further stress this point, a 2015 public opinion studies program led by the ASAN Institute indicated a shift in South Korean attitudes towards the acceptance of North Korean defectors into southern society. When asked if shared ethnicity was a key factor in supporting reunification, only 40.8% of the respondents, mainly those in their 60s and older, answered yes.³¹ This is a fairly perceptible drop from the overall 59.5% of South Koreans who, in 2007, felt that shared ethnicity was the main driving factor for reunification.³² As Korean society remains wary of shouldering the burden of the potential economic costs of reunification, Kim et al. warn that “this decline in the importance of ethnic nationalism, if it continues, will undermine of the central tenets of reunification by choice, [and] could very well weaken the reunification picture overall.”³³

Of course, ethnic nationalism is still very much relevant to Korean identity. However, based on the survey results, a comfortable assumption can be made that civic identity is gradually trumping ethnic identity as the determining factor in what it means to be Korean. This is to say that if shared ethnic identity has been the main driver and the

³⁰ Kim J. Y., *National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors*, 102.

³¹ Ji Yoon Kim et al., *South Korean Attitudes Toward North Korea and Reunification*, Public Opinion Studies Program (Seoul, Korea: The ASAN Institute for Policy Studies, February 2015), 34, <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/south-korean-attitudes-toward-north-korea-and-reunification/>.

³² Kim et al., *South Korean Attitudes Toward North Korea and Reunification*, 35.

³³ Kim et al., *South Korean Attitudes Toward North Korea and Reunification*, 35.

most often cited and emotionally compelling reason for Korean reunification, then the fact that an increasing number of South Koreans are rejecting the notion of ethnic nationalism as the unifying factor between themselves and North Koreans effectively crumbles the justification for pursuing unification in the first place.

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III. POPULATION MOVEMENT AND MIGRATION

Assuming a scenario post reunification in which South Korea absorbs North Korea under relatively peaceful conditions, Koreans on both sides of the border can expect a fairly porous movement of people ranging from managed re-settlements to mass migration. After all, in the years following the German unification, 2.45 million East Germans migrated to West Germany, whereas 1.45 million West Germans moved to the East.³⁴ To put this into a broader perspective, relative to the 1990 German population, the German migration flows account for 16.6% of East Germans leaving the East, while only 2.5% of West Germans left West Germany.³⁵ In sum, this resulted in a 6% population decline in East Germany in the first three years following the German unification.³⁶

This likely population movement from north to south and vice versa has the potential for a myriad of social implications. Whether South Koreans desire it or not, O notes that:

[South Koreans] may find hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of North Koreans entering South Korea. North Korea's continued food shortages, dysfunctional economy, and unclear power transition may lead to a situation where the mass movement of North Koreans becomes a reality. For South Korea to continue to prosper in a relatively stable environment, the smooth social integration of North Koreans is a necessity, not a luxury. Examining the current challenges that the North Korean defectors face in South Korea provides a glimpse of what to expect in the future.³⁷

In the likely event of a mass North-South migration, the North Korean refugees will crowd South Korea's already hyper-competitive labor market, potentially disproportionately disadvantaging the South Koreans workers who already occupy the lower economic strata

³⁴ Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln and Matthias Schündeln, "Who Stays, Who Goes, Who Returns? East-West Migration within Germany Since Reunification," *Economics of Transition* 14, no. 4 (2009): 704, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0351.2009.00373>.

³⁵ Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln, "Who Stays, Who Goes, Who Returns?" 704.

³⁶ Timothy Moss, "Cold Spots of Urban Infrastructure: Shrinking Process in Eastern Germany and the Modern Infrastructure Ideal," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 2 (June 2008): 437, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2008.00790>.

³⁷ O, "The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea," 165.

of the South Korean population. Additionally, the re-settlement of North Korean refugees in an overcrowded Seoul and its surrounding metropolitan areas will further exacerbate Seoul's infrastructure limitations and socio-spatial inequality. In order to best understand why population movement and migration is likely post reunification, it is first prudent to examine both the motivations behind recent North Korean defections, and the areas in which the majority of North Korean defectors have settled since assimilating into South Korean society.

A. NUMBERS, MOTIVATIONS, AND PERCEPTION OF NORTH KOREAN DEFECTIONS

As of 2018, there are 32,467 North Korean defectors registered with the Ministry of Unification, among which 72% are females. Table 2 shows the steady influx of North Korean refugees into South Korea since 1990. Arguably, slightly more than 32,000 people in a sea of over 51 million South Koreans constitutes an inconsequential fraction of the overall population, presumably not noticeable to make a significant difference. However, the generational divergence in the South Korean perception of the North Koreans living among them says otherwise.

Table 2. North Korean Refugees Entering South Korea³⁸

| | Before 1990 | 1990-2000 | 2001-2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Male | 564 | 357 | 5,548 | 795 | 404 | 369 | 305 | 251 | 302 | 188 | 168 |
| Female | 43 | 131 | 13,905 | 1,911 | 1,098 | 1,145 | 1,092 | 1,024 | 1,116 | 939 | 969 |
| Total Refugees | 607 | 488 | 19,453 | 2,706 | 1,502 | 1,514 | 1,397 | 1,275 | 1,418 | 1,127 | 1,137 |
| % of female defectors | 7% | 27% | 72% | 71% | 73% | 76% | 78% | 80% | 79% | 83% | 85% |

³⁸ Adapted from the "Policy on North Korean Defectors," Ministry of Unification, June 2018, http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/relations/statistics/defectors/.

In a 2018 nation-wide opinion poll conducted by the Korean Gallup Daily, 1002 people from every province of South Korea were asked to state their preferences regarding the expediency and timeliness of the Korean reunification. In response to the question, “regarding North/South reunification, which do you most prefer among these three options: immediate reunification; in 10+ years’ time; or maintain the status quo,” over 21% of those aged 40 and over replied immediate reunification, while just 10% of those aged 39 and under replied the same.³⁹ About 70% of those 39 and under wished to postpone reunification by 10+ years, while only 57% of those 40 and over preferred the same. Finally, 18% of both age groups noted their preference for maintaining the status quo.⁴⁰ This signals a national trend in the younger generation being more wary and insensitive to the possibility of Korean reunification than their older generation counterparts.

Among the reasons for this generational divergence in perspectives, one key factor stands out the most. The North Korean motivations for defecting have shifted rather considerably since the 1990s, resulting in a different social composition of North Koreans crossing the southern border.⁴¹ According to Lankov, pre-famine North Korean defectors had political utility. These defectors did not threaten the South Korean identity that is built on economic success, a concept that will be further explored in the following chapter, as they came from higher echelons of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) society, and possessed more marketable, specialized skills that equipped and prepared them for life in a capitalist democracy. The elite defectors of the pre-1990s had “education, social skills, and adaptability and could easily find a place for themselves in South Korean society” without significant aid from the ROK government.⁴² These privileged defectors often brought with them valuable intelligence, and, consequently, held certain propaganda values that could be exploited by the South Korean government to achieve political goals.⁴³

³⁹ “2018 Gallup Korea Daily Opinion Poll,” Gallup Korea, February 22, 2018, www.gallup.co.kr.

⁴⁰ Gallup Korea, “2018 Gallup Korea Daily Opinion Poll.”

⁴¹ Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise,” 109–10.

⁴² Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise,” 111.

⁴³ Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise,” 113.

Two notable examples of such defectors are Hwang Jang Yop and Lee Han Young. Hwang, the highest ranking North Korean defector to seek asylum in South Korea to date, was a North Korean politician who was largely credited as being the architect of North Korea's guiding *Juche* ideology of self-reliance. Hwang defected to South Korea in 1997, and until his death in 2010, he collaborated with the ROK government to denounce the Pyongyang regime. Lee Han Young, a nephew of one of Kim Jong Il's many wives, defected to South Korea in 1982 via Switzerland. Lee was an outspoken critic of the Kim regime, and worked to deface the Kim family by sharing openly with the media revealing stories of Kim Jong Il's escapades with Lee's aunt, Song Hye Rim, the mother of recently assassinated Kim Jong Nam. Simply put, until the mid-1990s, North Korean defectors seeking refuge in South Korea were treated as the high value government assets that they effectively were.

However, the social composition of an average recent North Korean defector is markedly different and more representative of what South Korea can expect in the event of a complete reunification. Lankov describes that a "typical defector of the early 2000s is an impoverished and undereducated farmer from a remote country area, or an under- or unemployed worker" with little or no educational background.⁴⁴ According to the Ministry of Unification, out of the 32,467 registered northern defectors, 27,332, or close to 85%, were previously unemployed or held jobs as laborers prior to defection.⁴⁵ Ineptly armed with undesirable skills, little education, and no knowledge of the capitalist way of life, most recent defectors require substantial government aid, both monetary and vocational, to adjust to South Korean society. The majority of the recent defectors are motivated by hunger and destitution, meaning they hold little or no political utility for the South. Accordingly, the North Korean defectors of the 2000s and beyond are "seen as a social burden and a potential irritant in relations with Pyongyang" in the eyes of the South Korean public.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Lankov, "Bitter Taste of Paradise," 111.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Unification, "Policy of North Korean Defectors."

⁴⁶ Lankov, "Bitter Taste of Paradise," 130.

This brief overview of the diverging generational perspective with regard to the Korean unification highlights the current nation-wide view, especially among the younger generation, that unification with the North is not immediately preferable and should be postponed. This South Korean sentiment is echoed in a July 1986 German poll in which support for the German unification stood at 47% for those between 16–29 years of age, 56% among those 30–44 years old, 66% for those age 45–59, and 73% for those 60 years and older.⁴⁷

This thesis does not seek to further analyze the root cause of this generational gap, nor claim that this negative perception will make South Korea less likely to pursue unification in the first place. By all accounts, the unification of the Korean peninsula implies a radical change in context that might change how the South Korean citizens and the ROK government feel about and behave towards North Koreans. This is to say that in the event of reunification, North Korean migrants will not be defectors anymore, no longer making up a second-thought, inconsequential minority proportion of the South Korean society. Arguably, the entire country of former-South Korea will be mobilized, willingly or not, to deal with the impending social repercussions of merging the two Korean societies. Thus, it would be reasonable to claim that when faced with imminent social churn, South Korea will expand its existing policies and develop new strategies to deal more squarely with the social integration of North Koreans into the South Korean society.

On the other hand, based on the fact that former East and West Germany have yet to achieve complete social parity, and also having requisite knowledge of the wealth-and-status defined nature of South Korean society, this thesis takes the pessimistic view that the social backlash from accommodating northern refugees will likely prove to be prohibitively challenging. While it is fair to predict a national mobilization in face of full-fledged unification, this thesis suggests an alternative scenario in which the current negative defector perception will simply be multiplied and intensified upon unification. If mere 32,000 Northerners living among 51 million Southerners can form this, generously

⁴⁷ Jin Min Chung and John D. Nagle, “Generational Dynamics and the Politics of German and Korean Unification,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (December 1992): 858, <https://www.doi.org/10.2307/448815>.

put, unfriendly perception, then it would make a certain amount of sense that the social implications of a full-fledged North/South reunification would require a massive undertaking and prove to be exceptionally challenging for both parties involved.

B. RE-SETTLEMENT OF NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES IN SOUTH KOREA

The population density in South Korea speaks volumes at 509 persons/km².⁴⁸ It is one of the densest countries in the world, and when ranked against other East Asian developed nations, Japan and Philippines are only 70% as densely populated as South Korea. In a country slightly larger than the state of Indiana, Seoul is arguably the largest, most populous, and the sole major metropolis of South Korea. South Korea's "unprecedentedly rapid" urbanization has created satellite cities that are heavily dependent on Seoul for the job market, commutability, and other economically related activities.⁴⁹ Due to South Korea's compressed economic growth in which its rate of urbanization since 1950 has surpassed that of other developing nations by almost five-fold, Kang observes that "the problem of urban concentration around the capital city of Seoul has been acute in the formation of urban space."⁵⁰

Nearly all central infrastructure of South Korean politics, economy, and society—government buildings, top companies, best schools, cultural centers, law firms, publishers, hospitals and many more—is headquartered in Seoul. This is significant to note for two reasons. First, due to such a heavy centralization in Seoul, competition is fierce to obtain everything from an entry-level job to entrance to schools, or even an apartment. As such, internal South Korean migration into Seoul is heavy with job-, education-, and housing-seekers with no ties to the city, which has contributed to job competition, housing shortage, environmental pollution, and nightmarish traffic congestion. Second, with South Korea reaching almost 82% urbanization, Seoul has increasingly become the hub of South Korean

⁴⁸ "Korea in the World," Korean Statistical Information Service, accessed September 5, 2018, http://kosis.kr/vis_eng/nso/worldInEng/selectWorldInEngMain.do.

⁴⁹ Myung Goo Kang, "Understanding Urban Problems in Korea: Continuity and Change," *Development and Society* 27, no. 1 (June 1998): 101, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44396778>.

⁵⁰ Kang, "Understanding Urban Problems in Korea," 101.

entrepreneurship.⁵¹ Accordingly, Seoul’s population—10.2 million within city limits and 25.6 million within the immediate surrounding metropolitan areas—encompasses slightly more than 50% of the entire country’s population.⁵² The Capital Region (CR), as Seoul and its surrounding metropolitan areas are commonly called, accounts for only 11.8% of the South Korean territory, yet 47.1% of South Korea’s total number of employment firms.⁵³

The centralized nature of South Korean society already makes Seoul a magnet for South and North Koreans alike. Due to the competitive and one-golden-track nature of the southern culture and education system, it is common knowledge that the best, the brightest, and the richest members of the South Korean society concentrate in the nation’s capital. For the majority who cannot afford the hefty price tag of living in Seoul proper, numerous satellite cities and surrounding suburbs have exploded in the past decade to accommodate the nearly 50% of the entire South Korean population that resides in the CR. This is to say that the rich and the poor alike flock towards the nation’s capital as everyone wants to be in, near, or around Seoul for its top feeder schools and universities, greater job opportunities—of the top 10 Korean *chaebols*, only one was headquartered outside of Seoul proper but still within the Gyeonggi province—more varied options for housing, ease of access to public transits, entrepreneurship opportunities, and centrality to pop culture, food, art, fashion, and recreational activities.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Unification’s re-settlement data shows that 60% of all North Korean defectors choose to re-settle in or near Seoul. Furthermore, just as it was the case when Berlin’s proximity to Brandenburg, a former-East German *Länder* (province), “consistently attracted more East-West migrants” than other Western German provinces,⁵⁴ South Korea can anticipate an even bigger influx of migrants into its capital due to Seoul’s

⁵¹ “The World Factbook,” Central Intelligence Agency, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ks.html>.

⁵² “Seoul,” Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2018, <http://english.seoul.go.kr/>.

⁵³ Hyung Min Kim and Kyoung Seok Jang, “South Korea’s Urban Development Dilemma,” *East Asia Forum*, February 28, 2014, www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/02/28/south-koreas-urban-development-dilemma.

⁵⁴ Frank Heiland, “Trends in East-West German Migration from 1989–2002,” *Demographic Research* 11, no. 7 (November 2004): 188. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2004.11.7>.

close proximity to the North Korean border. In this regard, Noland further emphasizes that “given the proximity of Seoul to the border, it is hard to imagine that [the] Korean unification would be accompanied by insufficient southward migration.”⁵⁵

Of course, upon unification, the South Korean government may encourage, or even require, a more dispersed settlement pattern among the North Korean migrants. However, if the German reunification sheds any light into Korea’s prospects, it is that economic stability and employment prospects drive migration patterns.⁵⁶ Due to the centralized nature of the South Korean society, and the dearth of variation in its economic centers, there is only one other city in South Korea, Busan, that even begins to compare to Seoul in terms of economic strength and infrastructure support. For these reasons, and based on the current defector re-settlement trends, it is logical to predict that just like their South Korean counterparts who seek the big city prospects and the thrill and excitement of Seoul, North Korean migrants will flock to the Capital Region as well.

There are two main social implications of a mass North-South migratory movement of North Korean refugees. First, unemployed Northerners flocking south seeking jobs will inevitably crowd the competitive labor market of not just Seoul, but of South Korea as a whole. Unfortunately, this will mainly disenfranchise the already disadvantaged South Korean unskilled laborers, and prove to be a slighter annoyance to the South Korean elites. Specific to Seoul and the Gyeonggi province, the re-settlement of North Korean refugees in an already overcrowded capital will threaten Seoul’s basic and critical infrastructures, exacerbate Seoul’s socio-spatial inequality, and deepen the social division of inner city neighborhoods and suburbs.

1. Labor-Crowding Effect

In terms of the labor-crowding effect, North Korean migration into South Korea will heighten job competition within the already disadvantaged, lower economic strata of

⁵⁵ Marcus Noland, *German Lessons for Korea: The Economics of Unification*, WP96-3, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, January 1996), 11, <https://piie.com/sites/default/files/publications/wp/wp96-3.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Heiland, “Trends in East-West German Migration from 1989–2002,” 185–88.

the South Korean population. Bidet directly addresses how the “recent massive influx of North Korean defectors from low social classes has made their work integration in South Korea a worrisome issue.”⁵⁷ Surprisingly, despite its recent accumulation of wealth, South Korea still has the “lowest proportion of regular salaried workers among OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] countries and a labor market that is characterized by growing bipolarization between secured [primary] and unsecured [secondary] jobs.”⁵⁸ Irrespective of its lowest unemployment rate among OECD nations, “the proportion of non-salaried workers is more than 45 percent of all salaried workers [compared to 24 percent in the U.S.],” and makes up one third of the entire South Korean labor force.⁵⁹

One might presume that since what the North Korean laborers bring to the table are skill sets that the majority of highly educated South Koreans eschew in the first place, competition will be minimal within the low-value labor sector. And until the 1990s, this was the case as work integration of North Korean defectors into the South Korean labor market did not pose a big challenge due to three main reasons.⁶⁰ First, only a small, thus manageable stream of defectors trickled into South Korea in the first forty years following the separation. As an example, in 1988 the entire population of northern defectors living in South Korea remained just under 600; this number has drastically increased to almost 33,000 today.⁶¹ Second, those who defected prior to the mid-1990s were skilled workers and members of elite social groups (i.e., diplomats, businessmen, or military officers) with translatable skills.⁶² Lastly, their motivations for defection were ideological, not

⁵⁷ Eric Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants: The Case of North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” *Asian Perspective* 33, no. 2 (2009): 151, <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2009.0021>.

⁵⁸ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 152.

⁵⁹ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 152.

⁶⁰ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 155.

⁶¹ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 155.

⁶² Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 155.

economic.⁶³ Under these favorable conditions, the pre-1990s defectors were well-accepted and widely regarded as valuable assets.

However, changes in the defector population's composition since the 2000s, with the arrival of more North Korean families, more women defectors than men, and differences in social and economic origins, have led the realistic skill level of an average North Korean migrant to be in the low-value, manufacturing sector. Consequently, it will not be the above-average South Korean worker in the South's dominant service industry who will compete with the newly arrived northern migrants. Rather, it will be the below-average South Korean workers—rural workers, farmers, merchants, factory workers, and laborers—precisely those Southerners who are already on the lower end of the labor market spectrum, who will find themselves in competition, and perhaps becoming even more disenfranchised as North Korean refugees prove more willing to work for lower wages in harsher, more grueling conditions. Thus, the “influx of migrants without any working experience or experience only in non-professional areas makes a priori their work integration all the more problematic” with respect to competition with the southern non-salaried workers.⁶⁴

Table 3 shows North Korean defectors categorized by their professional backgrounds prior to defection. Data shows that an overwhelming majority of North Korean defectors—85% of the sample—were either unemployed or held jobs as unskilled workers in their previous life.⁶⁵ This is highly representative of North Korea's current labor force distribution by occupation, which according to the Central Intelligence Agency, estimates that 37% of North Koreans are engaged in agriculture while 63% are employed in industries; it is believed that a negligible percentage of the DPRK population is part of the services labor force.⁶⁶ Furthermore, it is likely that 25–26% of the North Korean population is unemployed.

⁶³ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 155.

⁶⁴ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 158.

⁶⁵ Ministry of Unification, “Policy of North Korean Defectors.”

⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook.”

Table 3. North Korean Defectors by Their Northern Professional Backgrounds⁶⁷

| | Management | Military | Workers | Unemployed | Volunteer Sector | Arts & Sports | Professionals | Children | Total |
|--------|------------|----------|---------|------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|--------|
| Male | 404 | 681 | 3,986 | 3,169 | 83 | 79 | 211 | 481 | 9,094 |
| Female | 136 | 130 | 8,517 | 11,660 | 1,310 | 204 | 496 | 571 | 23,024 |
| Total | 540 | 811 | 12,503 | 14,829 | 1,393 | 283 | 707 | 1,052 | 32,118 |

Contrastingly, South Korea’s labor force distribution places the majority of the Southerners, 70%, in the services sector, with 25% involved in industries and a minority 5% working in the agriculture sector.⁶⁸ In the event of mass North-South population movement, the South will find it challenging to cope with not only the sudden competition for limited jobs in its agriculture and industry labor sectors, but, more importantly, it will also find that its citizens who are already occupying the lower class of southern society will feel the brunt of the competition. Of course, not all North Koreans will relocate to metropolitan hubs for employment, but for those that do, the competition will be fierce between these two groups of Koreans.

For those northern refugees that do venture outside the capital into the more rural areas, employment prospects may be more promising. Interestingly enough, the potential North-South migration and the sudden increase in unspecialized labor may not signal all bad news for South Korea. In fact, it may even help relieve some of the pressures of South Korea’s overall labor shortage that the country has felt since the late 1990s. This void is predominantly in the low-productivity, low-skill labor market, which has subsequently been filled by foreign migrants from Southeast Asia. Projections from the 2019 OECD report on the status of South Korea’s recruitment of immigrant workers estimates the largest jump in old-age dependency ratio between 2015 and 2060. This means that the proportion of South Korea’s working-age population will decrease from 73% in 2013 to

⁶⁷ Adapted from the Ministry of Unification, “Policy on North Korean Defectors.”

⁶⁸ Korean Statistical Information Service, “Korea in the World.”

53% by 2030 and even further to 50% by 2060.⁶⁹ Concurrent with the decline in working-age population is the rapidly aging population that is expected to comprise 40% of the overall South Korean population by 2060, while the new generation of workers—those under 15—will make up a scant 10%.⁷⁰ Further compounding this issue is the unprecedentedly highly educated youth who are unwilling to take low-skilled jobs, thus leaving a large vacancy of 700,000 jobs in the low-value chain of small and microenterprises (SMEs) in 2017.⁷¹ The 2019 OECD report states that the “changing educational composition of the working age population has not meant the disappearance of low-productivity, low-wage jobs.”⁷² Thus, these low-quality jobs, typically characterized by low wages, poor promotion and future employment prospects, and poor working conditions, have been filled by foreign workers recruited from poorer Southeast Asian nations.⁷³

To date, South Korea has published three “Basic Plans for Immigration Policies”; the first in 2008, the second in 2013, and the latest in 2018. Each plan seeks to systematically control and centralize South Korea’s immigration policies, and establish a long-term plan to enhance Korea’s multiculturalism, while maintaining its global competitiveness.⁷⁴ While the latest plan recognized the “growing role of the foreign workforce and the increasing share of immigrants in the Korean population, [the plan still] reflected policy objectives to reduce the proportion of low-skilled workers, and [instead,] attract higher-wage, higher skill migrants.”⁷⁵ In the event of a mass North-South migration post-unification, the North Korean refugees could certainly fill this void. In doing so, perhaps the homogeneous South Korean population that is historically resistant to foreign

⁶⁹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers: Korea 2019* (Paris, France: OECD Publishing, January 28, 2019), 32, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264307872-en>.

⁷⁰ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers*, 32.

⁷¹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers*, 38.

⁷² Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers*, 39.

⁷³ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers*, 46.

⁷⁴ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers*, 54–57.

⁷⁵ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers*, 55.

immigration may become more receptive to the migration of ethnic North Koreans to fill the labor shortage in the low-value sectors that would better match the skill and education level of an average northern refugee.

For the southern elites who occupy the upper echelons of South Korea's society, competition stemming from the migration of northern refugees will manifest itself in a variety of other ways. Certainly, the average northern refugee will not be competing with these elite members for similar jobs or housing. However, even the southern elites will have to make concessions to accommodate the new arrivals. The most recent example of such compromises was seen during the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, when the political decision to compete under a unified ice hockey team ousted 12 South Korean hockey players—who had rightfully and competitively earned their spot on the Olympic team—in order to accommodate 12 North Korean hockey players.

Other ways in which the South's best and the brightest could be affected are through targeted government intervention policies that would change and/or lower the standard for North Korean refugees. This could be in the form of *suneung shiyeom* (College Scholastic Ability Test) exemption for North Koreans wishing to pursue higher education, or simply the expansion of the existing Special Admission for Expatriates Act, which offers North Korean defectors admission to prestigious South Korean universities on a non-competitive basis.⁷⁶ The ROK government also currently gives “convenience store contract priority to defector-owned business within public facilities, [and] subsidizes half of the defectors’ monthly wages for two years to encourage South Korean companies to hire defectors.”⁷⁷ The continuation and potential expansion of these monetary aid or special favors programs for North Korean entrepreneurs, as well as employment and college acceptance quotas that mandate hiring and admission of less qualified North Korean candidates despite the prevalence of more qualified South Korean candidates, will likely cause social friction among the South Korean elites.

⁷⁶ O, “The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” 157.

⁷⁷ O, “The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” 157.

To be fair, not all North Korean refugees will be low-skill laborers. It is estimated that 25% of the northern population belongs to the core class of North Korean society—a sizeable portion, which, according to the RAND Corporation, encompasses 4.4 million adults.⁷⁸ If the German reunification provides any insight into the migratory patterns of educated elites, it is that higher educational background was a strong positive predictor of East-West migration.⁷⁹ As young, vocationally trained, and/or college-educated East Germans migrated West at a much higher proportion after 1998, East Germany felt a net loss of its most productive group, and subsequently experienced a “brain drain” of its best and brightest leaving the East while the members of its lowest social group remained behind.⁸⁰ This in turn reflects what Fuchs-Schündeln notes are “low expectations for future economic convergence between the two parts of Germany,”⁸¹ and could potentially explain what Lang deems shrinkage and peripheralization of East Germany at the cost of Western metropolization.

Post-unification, the northern elites will surely seek employment. Gathering from their professional qualifications, and a “strong sense of distinction between white collar and blue collar labor” that they bring with them, O notes that when given a choice, North Koreans “prefer white collar jobs, while eschewing blue collar work.”⁸² In this case, the southern elites will be competing with equally well-educated and skilled candidates in an already hyper-competitive labor market, which is bound to cause social churn and widespread discontent. Nevertheless, whether it is a manual laborer of the hostile class or a Pyongyang University graduate well-versed in computer engineering, the mass migration of northern refugees seeking employment in the southern economy will be met with some resistance. If current trends hold, which this thesis suspects they will, northern refugees migrating to South Korea will face the resentment of a small margin of unemployed

⁷⁸ Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing North Korean Elites for Reunification*, RR1985 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1985.html, 3.

⁷⁹ Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln, “Who Stays, Who Goes, Who Returns?” 723.

⁸⁰ Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln, “Who Stays, Who Goes, Who Returns?” 719.

⁸¹ Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln, “Who Stays, Who Goes, Who Returns?” 719.

⁸² O, “The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” 159.

southern workers, biased hiring managers, dissatisfied and stressed southern students seeking entrance to a selective few prestigious universities, and angry capitalists who will feel threatened by the new competition of the northern entrepreneurs.

2. Infrastructure Limitations and Socio-Spatial Inequality

Migration of North Koreans into Seoul will over-capacitate the capital's basic infrastructure systems and exacerbate the city's existing socio-spatial inequality unless the South Korean government develops policies to augment its smaller metropolitan cities by encouraging infrastructure building, entrepreneur development, and permanent relocation of South Korea's *chaebol* headquarters out of Seoul. It cannot be emphasized enough the over-dominance of Seoul as the sole South Korean hub for culture, entertainment, finance, business, and politics. Perhaps the most ambitious and costly initiative to tackle Seoul's over-taxed infrastructure and overcrowding issue was a 2004 proposition to "relocate the capital and make the country less Seoul-centric."⁸³ Named the Sejong Special Autonomous City in honor of the father of the Korean alphabet and the revered King of the Joseon Dynasty, Sejong City began as a campaign promise by President Roh Moo Hyun who envisioned creating a center of government "similar to Washington, D.C., while leaving Seoul as a business [and] financial capital equivalent to New York."⁸⁴

Though the city was officially established in 2014, intervention by the South Korean constitutional court and political in-fighting has brought more failures than successes to the new city. While, to date, 36 government ministries call Sejong City home, the movement of the governing function out of Seoul has not led to the subsequent movement of private enterprises, businesses, schools, and other community enriching features of a self-sustaining city into Sejong. In addition, due to the centrality of better schools and tutoring centers available in Seoul, the majority of the city's 280,000

⁸³ "Sejong City in South Korea: A Look at Success and Failures of the New Administrative Hub," China Global Television Network, news video, 00:03-00:12, January 7, 2018, https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d517a4e35634464776c6d636a4e6e62684a4856/share_p.html.

⁸⁴ Jason Watts, "South Korea to Move Capital 100 Miles South: Rural Region Will Become Huge Building Site for New City," *Guardian News and Media Limited*, August 12, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/12/northkorea>.

population are made up of public servants who often either leave their families behind in the capital, or commute 75 miles from Seoul—certainly not the intent of the government’s relocation.

Meanwhile, Seoul and its surrounding Capital Region are not seeing meaningful decreases in its population size, and “concerns about the overly dominant national role of the capital—the Seoul metropolitan area accounts for nearly half of the country’s gross domestic product—in line with growing pressure for a more even distribution of national wealth” continues to grow.⁸⁵ Kang supplements further that given the trend that “the problems of the capital cities are not being solved, but are being diffused into the surrounding urban areas,” an influx of more people into an already overcrowded space could result in the North Koreans being pushed to Seoul’s periphery, and the potential mushrooming of Seoul’s satellite cities.⁸⁶

This situation would only be made worse by an influx of North Korean migration, as there would be an inadequate supply of public goods, infrastructure, and resources to accommodate the new migrants. Consequently, all those living in the capital region, with the slight exception of those in the wealthiest neighborhoods, would be affected in the event of a North Korean migration, as they would be forced to compete even more for the already limited schools, hospitals, housing, transportation, and water and power supplies against their northern counterparts. Understandably, this competition is bound to meet resistance and cause widespread annoyance, if not discontent, among South Koreans who may feel more entitled to live in “their” Seoul than the “foreign” North Koreans. On this point, Kim observes that the concentration of North Korean refugees in Seoul is increasing due to the common belief that the “densely populated districts of the National Capital Region hold vast opportunities to earn money.”⁸⁷ In terms of supply and demand for Seoul’s infrastructure then, this northern desire to settle in Seoul and its environs signals

⁸⁵ Simon Mundy, “South Korea’s \$21bn Alternative to Seoul Lacks Transport and Soul,” *Financial Times*, November 18, 2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/ba9646f6-4dc6-11e3-8fa5-00144feabdc0>.

⁸⁶ Kang, “Understanding Urban Problems in Korea,” 103.

⁸⁷ Soon-yang Kim, “Tackling the Social Exclusion of the North Korean Refugees in South Korea,” *Korea Observer* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 112, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/251639663/fulltextPDF/9072872711CB4D04PQ/1?accountid=12702>.

problems for Seoul’s limited housing supply that stems from the prohibitively high cost of land.⁸⁸ Similarly, Ha concurs that despite South Korea’s miraculous economic performance, “the Korean [urban] housing situation has experienced serious problems” since the 1980s.⁸⁹ She further notes that “given the great shortage of housing, owner-occupation has declined, rented tenure has become more common, and overcrowding has become endemic.”⁹⁰

Table 4 shows North Korean defector re-settlement in South Korea by region. According to this data from the Ministry of Unification, 7,020 defectors re-settled in Seoul city proper, 9,522 defectors established roots in Gyeonggi-do—the most populous province in South Korea that surrounds the capital city—and 2,807 North Koreans migrated to the city of Incheon, the third most populous South Korean city that is located just 15 miles outside of Seoul.⁹¹ In sum, this accounts for 19,349 defectors among 32,467 registered North Koreans residing in South Korea, meaning, 60% of all North Korean defectors chose to re-settle in or near Seoul—one of the densest, most overcrowded cities in the world that is already struggling to stretch its infrastructure to meet the needs of the growing population.

Table 4. North Korean Defector Settlement By Region⁹²

| | Seoul | Gyeonggi | Incheon | Busan | North Gyeongsang | South Gyeongsang | Daegu | North Chungcheong | South Chungcheong and Sejong |
|--------|-------|----------|---------|-------|------------------|------------------|-------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Male | 2,258 | 2,395 | 780 | 269 | 226 | 246 | 137 | 241 | 332 |
| Female | 4,762 | 7,127 | 2,027 | 765 | 865 | 813 | 531 | 1,010 | 1,196 |
| Total | 7,020 | 9,522 | 2,807 | 1,034 | 1,091 | 1,059 | 668 | 1,251 | 1,528 |

⁸⁸ Kim S. Y., “Tackling the Social Exclusion of the North Korean Refugees in South Korea,” 112–113.

⁸⁹ Seong-Kyu Ha, “Housing Poverty and the Role of Urban Governance in Korea,” *Environment & Urbanization* 16, no. 1 (April 2004): 139, <https://doi.org/10.1177/095624780401600112>.

⁹⁰ Ha, “Housing Poverty and the Role of Urban Governance in Korea,” 139.

⁹¹ Ministry of Unification, “Policy of North Korean Defectors.”

⁹² Adapted from the Ministry of Unification, “Policy on North Korean Defectors.”

It is not just a shortage of housing or the heightened competition for jobs, however, that will complicate the social integration of North Korean refugees into Seoul. At a macro-level, the potential, and highly likely, projection of social disparity between the Northerners and the Southerners into spatial inequality within Seoul should be a cause for greater concern. Arguably, socio-spatial inequality already exists not just in Seoul or within the Capital Region, but across the country as a whole. This phenomenon is certainly not exclusive to South Korea. According to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt), out of Germany's 82 million population in 2018, only 15 million, or 18%, live in the former eastern German provinces.⁹³ Nearly thirty years after the German unification, East Germans continue to have statistically higher probability of living below the poverty line, experience poorer health, and have productivity levels only 67% that of their western counterparts. Furthermore, inequalities in both educational and employment opportunities exist between the two Germanys, contributing to what Moss notes as the overall population and economic shrinkage of East German cities since the 1990s—east German cities Hoyerswerda, Schwerin, and Halle saw 29%, 21%, and 21% population declines respectively.⁹⁴ To contextualize this even further, out of the top 10 most valuable German companies in terms of contribution to the national GDP, not a single one is presently headquartered in former East German provinces.

What is particular about South Korea's socio-spatial inequality is that South Korea's rapid economic growth and government directed industrial restructuring has led to a rather sharp social cleavage between the haves and the have nots. According to Kang, the Gross Regional Domestic Product of South Korea's two largest metropolitan hubs—Seoul and its surrounding province Gyeonggi, and Busan and its surrounding province Gyeongsan—make up 60.4% of the national GDP.⁹⁵ Figures such as these indicate an almost singular concentration of jobs, people, infrastructure, housing, and government

⁹³ "German Population," Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Bevoelkerungsstand/Tabellen/zensus-geschlecht-staatsangehoerigkeit-2018.html>.

⁹⁴ Moss, "Cold Spots of Urban Infrastructure," 437–39.

⁹⁵ Kang, "Understanding Urban Problems in Korea," 107.

services in just two parts of the country. Furthermore, pork barrel politics at the executive branch level also exacerbates South Korea's socio-spatial inequality.

South Korean presidents have historically been accused of imparting favoritism on their hometowns, and funneling disproportionate amount of government funds to Gyeongsan Province after being elected into office. Since its transition to democracy in the 1980s, six out of South Korea's eight presidents have hailed from Gyeongsan Province, a southeastern province of South Korea where they country's second largest city, Busan, is located. Thus, it is no mere coincidence that the only other part of South Korea that is as comparably developed as Seoul, is precisely the hometown province of the majority of the past South Korean presidents. The tendency of South Korean presidents to practice pork-barrel politics has led to an uneven infrastructure development across the country. For example, Jeolla (southwest) and Gangwon (northeast) provinces hold the majority of rural South Korean jobs, remain sparsely developed, and are nowhere near the advanced and progressive infrastructure level of Gyeonggi (northwest) and Gyeongsan (southeast) provinces. Thus, the conclusion reached by the majority of North Korean defectors, who flock to Seoul based on what Kim notes is the common belief that the "densely populated districts of the National Capital Region hold vast opportunities to earn money," is not all that incorrect.⁹⁶

The potential for Seoul's socio-spatial inequality is exacerbated by the city's existing infrastructure limitations even without the future influx of North-South migration. According to a World Health Organization report, "although the population and automobiles in Seoul accounting for a greater percentage of figures in Korea made traffic increase heavily, there is a limit to providing [more] roads to accommodate."⁹⁷ Aside from traffic congestion, the resultant air pollution and health effects have become an issue that must be resolved not only to improve quality of life, but also to sustain the city's competitiveness. Should reunification instigate migration of North Koreans into the capital,

⁹⁶ Kim, S. Y., "Tackling the Social Exclusion of the North Korean Refugees in South Korea," 112.

⁹⁷ "Seoul's Challenges and Achievements for an Environmentally Sustainable Healthy Urban Transport System," accessed September 18, 2018, http://www.wpro.who.int/environmental_health/documents/docs/SeoulReportonESHUT.pdf.

Seoul, a city that is already threatening to burst at the seams, will struggle to cope with a sudden population increase. Certainly, reunification could be just the spark that is needed to squarely address Seoul's infrastructure limitations and growing socio-spatial inequality. However, the current limited urban space does not leave much room for further infrastructure development; the current housing crisis will not get better with more people seeking urban housing, especially when lacking the land space to build more housing; and more people seeking private car ownership or using public transportation will not alleviate congestion or improve Seoul's air quality. By all accounts, it seems that Seoul is at or very near its maximum capacity. In preparation for potential unification, policies to stagger and/or limit population movement into the capital, and more programs like the 2004 Sejong City initiative seem necessary for a managed and peaceful integration of the two Korean societies.

IV. DISCRIMINATION AND EMERGENCE OF A CLASS SYSTEM

The following sections argue that conflicting values and stark differences in societal norms make it prohibitively challenging for North Koreans to assimilate into South Korea's modern, fast-paced, success-crazed, and materialistic society. Section A measures the growing social distance between the two Korean societies that is intensified by the split of pan-Korean nationalism into two separate northern and southern national identities. Section B elaborates on the divergence of cultural and societal values that further contributes to the widening social distance between North and South Koreans. This section relies on defector accounts and references education data to highlight the social discrimination issues among defector teens in South Korea's school environment. It also addresses rampant labor market discrimination against defectors that, more often than not, subjugates North Koreans to dirty, difficult, and dangerous (3D) secondary market jobs.

A. THE SPLIT OF PAN-KOREAN NATIONALISM AND GROWING SOCIAL DISTANCE

National identity plays a determinant role in policy making. Accordingly, if one clear national identity exists within a country, then it becomes much easier to forge an agreeable one-track policy that reflects the nation's identity. However, the key issue with the Korean peninsula is that pan-Korean nationalism has sharply diverged into two factions of South Korean "Us" versus a North Korean "Them." Furthermore, contrasting values shaped by this split national identity contributes to the stark cultural differences between North and South Korea. Despite the official party line of "*Woorinen Hana, We are One*," 2007 research shows that "South Koreans felt a great deal of social distance towards North Korean refugees."⁹⁸ Mistrust and foreignness that undercut kinship and ethnic ties are the primary reasons for this negative sentiment, and this divergence in national identity could

⁹⁸ Hee Jin Kim, Ho Yeol Yoo, and Yun Kyung Chung, "Social Distance Towards the North Korean Refugees in South Korean Society," *Korea Observer* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 297, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1699511692/fulltextPDF/C30C872FF4794E5CPQ/1?accountid=12702>.

be a harbinger for systematic discrimination and emergence of a new class system in the event of Korean reunification.

National identity is forged when members of a society collectively undergo similar experiences, successes, and failures. Millard states that the “evolution of vastly different identities on the Peninsula has caused an almost irreparable social divide.”⁹⁹ While economic success and capitalism shaped South Korea’s identity, economic hardship and the pursuit of nuclear weapons gave rise to a wholly different northern identity. To clarify further, the South Korean national identity is synonymous with its membership as one of the “Four Asian Tigers,” or its moniker as the “Miracle on the Han River,” both referencing South Korea’s rapid and sustained economic success. On the other hand, the uniting factor of North Korea’s national identity has been the Kim family dynasty. This difference in national identity has evolved to create two opposing societies in which the northern and southern ideologies, so crucial to the development of their respective national identities, likely cannot co-exist.

Post-reunification, the Northerners will be pressed to shed *juche* ideology and embrace the South’s capitalist ideals. This transition has proven to be rather problematic among newly arrived defectors, who are often at a complete loss in finding a new identity once reaching South Korea. In the DPRK, all North Koreans are officially made to share the same identity as a comrade, someone who was more than likely born and raised in the same village, and surrounded by the same people with whom they live and work. In South Korea, however, as they are forced to shed this conformist northern identity through the rehabilitation process at the Hana Center, North Korean defectors struggle to come to terms with the lies, myths, embellishments, and defamations that previously defined their North Korean identity. This is not to say that North Koreans will never shed their old identity; however, the divergence of the two Korean governance systems and identities is fast

⁹⁹ Andrew S. Millard, “Reunification on the Korean Peninsula: Is Social-Reunification Feasible?” *Korea Observer* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 192, <https://doi.org/10.29152/KOIKS.2018.49.2.19.1>.

“reaching a point where the two paths may not be able to re-converge” under peaceful terms.¹⁰⁰

South of the DMZ, North Koreans are often referred to by the government and the media as *saeteomin* (or “new settlers”), defectors, and/or refugees, all fairly vague and broad terms that are meant to be politically correct. More colloquially, however, depending on the situation and personal feelings, they are called brothers, traitors, immigrants, low-class, or just simply, “not one of us.” This further confuses the newly arrived Northerners as to where they belong in the southern society. Are they no different from every other immigrant? Do they deserve special treatment and political asylum based on a shared ethnic lineage? Are they traitors to their country, or should they be hailed as heroes for overcoming such odds to reach safety? More often than not, according to the 2016 Unification Perception Survey, North Korean defectors are considered “second class citizens who form a new minority group in South Korean society.”¹⁰¹

The biggest issue, then, is the potential for this negative sentiment to multiply and intensify upon unification. Certainly, full-fledged unification will put South Koreans in closer proximity to North Koreans. And with this greater degree of personal interaction, Northerners living amongst the Southerners will become the new norm, and the current rejection of North Koreans as second class citizens could fade away. However, if the German example foreshadows Korea’s future prospects, this thesis does not find that scenario likely. In fact, while “the German economy is considered as the driver of the European Union, [the] social divide that was forged over the decades is far from recovered and the social distance remains relatively high.”¹⁰² To this day, despite the high levels of internal East-West migration following the German unification, “only 4% of all marriages in Germany are mixed marriages of people coming from the east and the west of the country.”¹⁰³ Despite being integrated for thirty years and economically thriving,

¹⁰⁰ Millard, “Reunification on the Korean Peninsula,” 212.

¹⁰¹ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 6.

¹⁰² Millard, “Reunification on the Korean Peninsula,” 192.

¹⁰³ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies?” 20.

Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowics sadly conclude that “differences in everyday culture or slight differences in behavior [continue to] give rise to the sense of distinctness, the ‘mental wall’, and the collection of stereotypes” among East and West Germans.¹⁰⁴

Son further examines this problematic defector re-settlement identity crisis by arguing that the Korean reunification is much more than just the merging of the peninsula. Rather, it is a multi-dimensional undertaking that involves fusing the two Korean psyches into a single national identity.¹⁰⁵ She notes that “the South Korea of today is vastly different from that of the immediate post-division period, and the passing of time and generational change have facilitated the adoption of norms and developments of varying origin that have fundamentally transformed both the state and [the] society.”¹⁰⁶ Consequently, this has contributed to the divergence of once pan-Korean nationalism into a South Korean “Self” and North Korean “Other.”¹⁰⁷

Son argues that “the presence of North Koreans in [southern] society...has come to pose a threat to what theorists describe as ‘societal security’ of the South as an independent state, different economically, socially, and politically from the North in a great many ways.”¹⁰⁸ This argument has merit and aptly explains the lack of closeness that South Koreans feel towards the North Korean defectors, because a sudden influx of North Korean defectors will threaten the South Korean national identity that is defined by economic success. This fear is verbalized in the 2016 Unification Perception Survey, where the “increasing immigrant numbers—including North Korean defectors—have led to fears that this will [have] a negative impact on the distribution of resources away from existing

¹⁰⁴ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies?” 20.

¹⁰⁵ Sarah A. Son, “Identity, Security and the Nation: Understanding the South Korean Response to North Korean Defectors,” *Asian Ethnicity* 17, no. 2 (2016): 172, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2016.1151236>.

¹⁰⁶ Son, “Identity, Security and the Nation,” 178.

¹⁰⁷ Son, “Identity, Security and the Nation,” 174.

¹⁰⁸ Son, “Identity, Security and the Nation,” 178.

members of society.”¹⁰⁹ Simply put, just as North Koreans struggle to take on a new southern identity free from communist teachings and un-constricted by *songbun*,¹¹⁰ an elaborate and hereditary North Korean social classification system, South Koreans feel threatened by the growing number of North Korean defectors challenging the very core of the South Korean identity—economic success and wealth.

Kim and Jang argue that *saeteomin*, translated as “new settlers,” “reflect different and unequal citizenship status and a divisive identity of Korean nationalism.”¹¹¹ They further claim that while current South Korean defector policy addresses the economic aspects of North Korean re-settlement, it does not adequately address the emotional factors, such as identity, discrimination, and social distance, that are crucial to successful social assimilation. This de facto second-class citizenship status is best represented through examples that expose the differences in culture and societal values, and lay bare the rampant social and labor market discrimination that perpetually disadvantages the North Koreans.

The clearest representation of this divergence in Korean national identity can be drawn from the results of the 2016 Unification Perception Survey conducted by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at the Seoul National University. This survey meticulously documents the South Korean perception of unification and southern attitudes toward North Korea. It also provides an in-depth analysis of the social integration of North Korean defectors and South Korean receptiveness to multiculturalism. The results conclude that “social distance toward North Korean defectors had increased compared to before, and more respondents are reluctant to accept North Koreans into South Korean

¹⁰⁹ Keun Sik Jung et al., *2016 Unification Perception Survey*, trans. Peter Ward (Seoul, Korea: Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University, August 5, 2017), 296–97, <http://t1.daumcdn.net/brunch/service/user/4g8x/file/QDVS5IWYNnZTz4expYILX9if6Ms.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ *Songbun* is a hereditary means of social control in which every North Korean citizen is classified at birth into one of 51 categories of trustworthiness to the Kim regime. For more information on *songbun*, see Robert Collins, *Marked for Life: Songbun, North Korea's Social Classification System*, (Washington, D.C.: The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2012), 1–5, 43–84, https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_Songbun_Web.pdf.

¹¹¹ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 21.

society...‘selective acceptance’ now seems to represent South Korean social attitudes toward North Korean defectors and migrants.”¹¹²

To better elaborate on the subject of selective acceptance, Kim compares the results of two East Asia Institute surveys conducted in 2005 and 2010 on South Korea’s acceptance of North Korean defectors. As shown in Table 5, while in 2005, nearly 50% of the interviewees responded that North Korean defectors should be unconditionally accepted into South Korea because they are Koreans, this percentage dropped to 38.1% in 2010, indicating a change in the South Korean attitude toward the acceptance of North Koreans into their society.¹¹³ By 2010, the majority of South Koreans felt that South Korea should only accept North Koreans on a conditional basis depending on the defector’s economic and/or diplomatic situation.¹¹⁴

Table 5. Acceptance of North Korean Defectors¹¹⁵

| | 2005 | 2010 |
|--|-------|-------|
| Should not admit North Korean defectors due to the political/economic burden | 8.0% | 9.0% |
| Should only accept North Korean defectors on a conditional basis | 38.8% | 49.9% |
| Should accept all North Korea defectors because they are Koreans | 46.2% | 38.1% |

To measure the degree of social distance that South Koreans feel toward their northern counterparts, the 2016 Unification Perception Survey used a 5-point scale to gauge South Koreans’ “sense of closeness” toward North Korean defectors living in South Korea. The findings are broken down into age groups in Table 6 to specifically stress that social distance South Koreans feel toward North Korean refugees transcends all age groups. While southern support for unification shows a clear generational divergence, with

¹¹² Jung et al., 2016 Unification Perception Survey, 296.

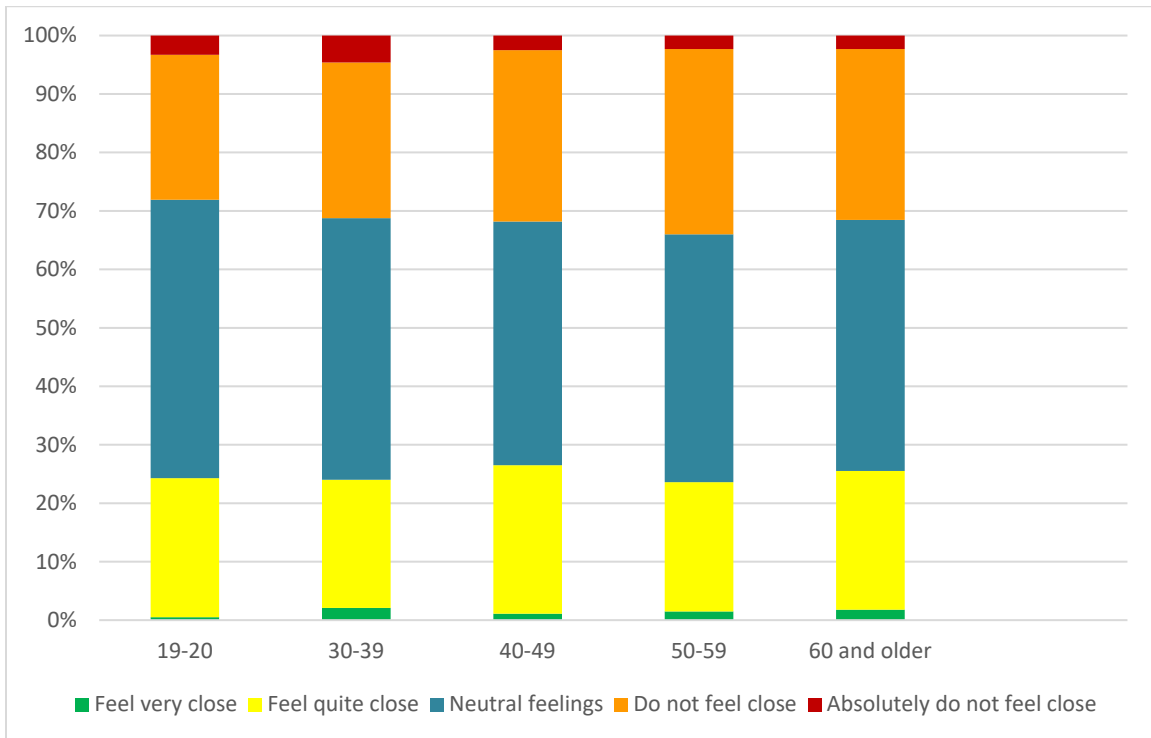
¹¹³ Kim J. Y., National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors, 102.

¹¹⁴ Kim J. Y., National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors, 102.

¹¹⁵ Adapted from Kim J. Y., National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors, 101–102.

younger generations less in favor than older generations,¹¹⁶ when it comes to the growing social distance between North and South Koreans, the survey suggests that a general consensus exists among the southern population that North Koreans are, in fact, foreigners and outsiders. When asked how close they felt to the North Korean defectors, 29% of all respondents replied positively saying that they felt close; 27.3% responded negatively, saying that they did not; and 43.7% gave a neutral response.¹¹⁷ This is to say that 71% of all South Koreans either gave noncommittal responses or felt no sense closeness at all towards the defectors who have been living amongst them for several decades.

Table 6. South Koreans’ Sense of Closeness to North Korean Defectors by Age¹¹⁸



¹¹⁶ Reference Chapter 2, pages 15–16; also see Gallup Korea, “2018 Gallup Korea Daily Opinion Poll.”

¹¹⁷ Jung et al., 2016 Unification Perception Survey, 266–67.

¹¹⁸ Adapted from Jung et al., 2016 Unification Perception Survey, 267.

To be fair, this lack of closeness or feelings of apathy towards low-skilled, economically motivated migrants is hardly exclusive to South Korea. Japan is notoriously homogenous, with one of the consistently lowest immigration rates among OECD countries; and one of the main platforms upon which pro-Brexit advocates campaigned for Britain's departure from the European Union was stronger immigration policies to restrict the inflow of Middle Eastern refugees. As it relates to reunification, Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz' conclusion that "the contact of the two [German] societies in many cases resulted in culture shock, which finally revealed the distance between them" seems particularly germane to the Korean case. In fact, according to a survey conducted in 2005, most former-East German residents believed that German "reunification and the changes it has entailed have brought them more losses than benefits."¹¹⁹ As early as 1992, 70% of East Germans believed that they were more different than similar from West Germans, while 52% of West Germans felt the same.¹²⁰ Seventeen years later in 2009, this social distance had narrowed only marginally, and 63% of East Germans saw more differences than similarities when they compared themselves to West Germans, and 42% of West Germans felt the same.¹²¹

Even more telling is the 2005 survey result conducted by Allenbacher Umfrage in which respondents were asked to identify in what terms, precisely, the residents of eastern and western Germany are different. The results of this survey are summarized in Table 7, but collectively, both groups were able to identify 22 categories in which residents of old federal states (i.e., former-West Germans) and residents of new federal states (i.e., former-East Germans) were different from each other¹²² Just as present day South Koreans across all age groups feel a great degree of social distance towards their northern counterparts, in post-reunified Germany, the dichotomy of 'us versus them' was reinforced through a number of stereotypes¹²³ Three decades have passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall, yet

¹¹⁹ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, "One Country, Two Societies?" 16.

¹²⁰ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, "One Country, Two Societies?" 17.

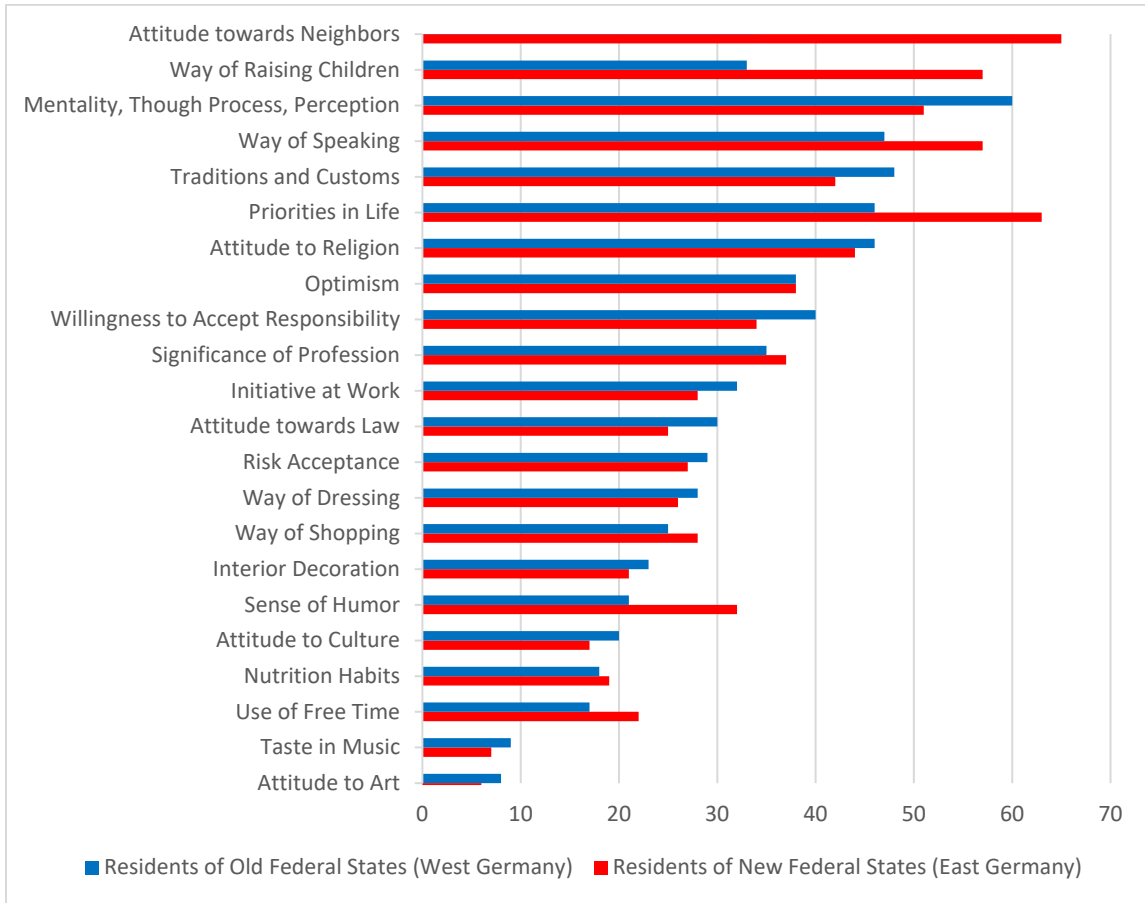
¹²¹ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, "One Country, Two Societies?" 17.

¹²² Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, "One Country, Two Societies?" 18.

¹²³ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, "One Country, Two Societies?" 17.

a “mental wall” between the two German states has “weakened insignificantly and [is] still part of the opinion many Germans share.”¹²⁴

Table 7. Categorization of Differences: Responses to the Question, “In What Terms, Precisely, are Residents of Eastern and Western Germany Different from One Another?”¹²⁵



B. CULTURE AND SOCIETAL VALUES

It is impossible to know for certain what North Koreans value. However, through deduction, it is possible to reason that their socialist society has conditioned North Koreans

¹²⁴ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies?” 17.

¹²⁵ Adapted from Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies?” 18.

to value community closeness and loyalty to the state, all the while encouraging an underlying instinctual level of mistrust and secrecy. Yet, despite the hardship in this “impossible state,” North Koreans still believe that they are the chosen people.¹²⁶ At first, it is incredibly difficult to comprehend such a radical belief. However, the fundamental differences in nation building post-Korean War, coupled with the integral role of the state in the formation of a national identity, have caused North Koreans to struggle to assimilate into any society that is not defined by the Kim dynasty.¹²⁷ Knowing this, it is a bit clearer to see why North Korean defectors currently living in South Korea struggle to integrate and accept the South Korean national identity as their own. South Korean national identity is heavily intertwined with its economic success. As a result, South Korean society is particularly sensitive to, and greatly values, wealth, status, and material goods. This is evident in the growing number of women receiving plastic surgeries, the booming cosmetic market, and in South Korea’s culture of gift giving—more or less systematic bribery disguised under a gift giving culture known as *chonji*.¹²⁸

South Korea’s culture of *chonji* is often perceived as essential to thrive and “win” in a hyper-competitive southern education system. Pressured by this culture, parents often send their children to school with envelopes filled with cash to solicit better grades or evaluations from the teachers. On National Teacher Appreciation Day, one mother of an elementary school student offered 500,000 won (\$500 USD) to her child’s teacher. When asked why she chose to do so, she replied, “I couldn’t help it. I am a mother, and I don’t want my child to be subject to disadvantages because I had not offered *chonji*.”¹²⁹ But this culture transcends the classroom and manifests itself in almost every aspect of South Korean society, including even the ROK military. Employees seeking promotion often disperse cash envelopes or extravagant gifts, and a former corporate lawyer confessed to

¹²⁶ Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 9.

¹²⁷ Millard, “Reunification on the Korean Peninsula,” 198–99.

¹²⁸ Jon S. T. Quah, “Curbing Corruption in Asian Countries: An Impossible Dream? Chapter 9: South Korea,” *Research in Public Policy Analysis and Management* 20 (March 2015): 314–18, [https://doi.org/10.1108/S0732-1317\(2011\)0000020016](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0732-1317(2011)0000020016).

¹²⁹ Byung-yeul Baek and Ji-youn Kwon, “Chonji, Bribe or Virtue?” *Korea Times*, May 13, 2014, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2015/09/135_157069.html.

doling out tens of thousands of dollars in ostensible *chonji* gifts to public prosecutors on behalf of the Samsung Family Group.¹³⁰

This *chonji* culture is exacerbated by the value that South Koreans place on getting into the right school, which leads to the right job, which allows one to find the right marriage partner. In such an extreme society with values that diverge so distinctly from that of the North Koreans, who have relied on the state to make every education and employment decision, it is reasonable to conclude that the majority of North Korean defectors who cannot afford *chonji* will be short-changed. This particularly rings true in wealth-crazed South Korea where “money informs their social relations” and determines an individual’s social value.¹³¹

Demick notes that the “qualities most prized in South Korean society—height, fair skin, affluence, prestigious degrees, designer clothes, English language fluency—are precisely those that the newly arrived defector lacks.”¹³² She argues further that this accounts for the low self-esteem among North Korean defectors and serves as a constant reminder to them that they simply do not fit in.

As another indicator, South Korea ranks number one in the world for the highest number of both invasive and non-invasive cosmetic procedures performed per capita.¹³³ Aptly nicknamed the “plastic surgery capital of the world,” South Korea sees one in five undergoing surgery to meet the typical South Korean beauty standard of large eyes, pronounced nose, and pointed chin (this figure is increased to one in three South Korean

¹³⁰ James G. Tillen and Sonia M. Delman, “A Bribe by Any Other Name,” *Forbes Magazine*, May 28, 2010, <https://www.forbes.com/2010/05/28/bribery-slang-jargon-leadership-managing-compliance.html#732babc341ca>.

¹³¹ Yoon Young Kim, “Negotiating Cultures and Identities: Education and Adaptation Among Young North Korean Settlers in South Korea,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 17, no. 4 (July 2015): 1027, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-015-0450-0>.

¹³² Barbara Demick, *Nothing To Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 257.

¹³³ Joowon Park, “The Gendered Contours of North Korean Migration: Sexualized Bodies and the Violence of Phenotypical Normalization in South Korea,” *Asian Ethnicity* 17, no. 2 (2016): 222, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2016.1151229>.

women in cities).¹³⁴ Women often undergo plastic surgery to be more competitive for jobs; parents often gift their children cosmetic procedures after they pass the National College Entrance Exam (*soohakneungyuk shehyum*); and the prevalence of South Koreans electing to go under the knife has made plastic surgery a social norm and solidified the western standard of beauty as the conventional South Korean beauty standard. Needless to say, this has proved quite problematic for North Korean defectors who do not understand the South Korean standard of beauty, while those who do are discouraged by their own appearances and their inability pay for elective procedures.

A report published by the ASAN Institute for Policy Studies identifies re-settlement challenges facing, in particular, young North Korean refugees. It cites social discrimination stemming from gaps in physical health and stereotypes, as well as labor market discrimination perpetuated by unemployment and lack of proper education as the causal factors for re-settlement difficulties experienced by North Korean defectors. The ROK Ministry of Education and the Migrant Youth Foundation under the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family operate academic assistance programs, such as extracurricular activities, mentorship programs, preferential admission to prestigious secondary and/or tertiary-level schools, and extra academic tutoring, all aimed at successful adaptation of North Koreans into South Korean school systems.¹³⁵ Yet, North Korean defectors continue to struggle and fail to meet the “optimistic expectation of [South Korea’s] trouble-free adaptation.”¹³⁶

Studies by Dake et al., the ASAN Institute, and Demick, concur that North Korean refugees “start from a lower physical baseline than their local peers.”¹³⁷ They attribute this to food shortages starting from infancy, particularly true among the famine generation, which results in “North Korean children and adults being significantly shorter in height

¹³⁴ “Plastic Makes Perfect,” *Economist*, January 30, 2013, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2013/01/30/plastic-makes-perfect>.

¹³⁵ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 2, 9.

¹³⁶ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 3.

¹³⁷ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 3.

and lower in weight than their South Korean peers of similar age.”¹³⁸ Not only that, this shorter stature and smaller frame also contributes to increased bullying in schools and ostracism by peers, which hinders formation of friendships and ultimately results in lowered self-esteem and sense of hopelessness in the school environment.¹³⁹ To compound these lowered self-esteem issues, North Korean refugees are often placed in lower grades with younger students. Even in this environment, North Korean students find it difficult to keep pace with their younger classmates and feel embarrassed, angry, and hopeless.¹⁴⁰

In a 2010 study, Pak calculated the median height and weight difference between South Korean youth and a sample of 1406 North Korean refugees between ages 6 and 19. Pak found that, on average, South Korean male youth were 10.1cm (3.98in) taller and 11.1kg (24.47lbs) heavier than their male North Korean counterparts. Similarly, South Korean female adolescents were 7.2cm (2.83in) taller and 3.8kg (8.38lbs) heavier than their North Korean female peers.¹⁴¹ The study also revealed that “long term poor eating could have impaired [North Korean youths’] physical and neurological functions.”¹⁴²

To better contextualize this, consider the example of Kim Hyuk, a teenager who defected to South Korea in 2001 when he was just nineteen years old. Having spent the bulk of his formative years in North Korea during the famine, Hyuk’s stature immediately gave away signs of a syndrome called “stunting” caused by severe childhood malnutrition.¹⁴³ As the body is deprived of nutrition, any resource it does have, it directs towards the head and brain to the detriment of the limbs. As the child grows to adulthood, a body shape with bowed out short legs, short arms, and short torso, but a disproportionately large head takes form.¹⁴⁴ At barely five feet tall with underdeveloped legs, Hyuk was at a

¹³⁸ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 3.

¹³⁹ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 3.

¹⁴¹ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 4–6.

¹⁴² Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 4.

¹⁴³ Demick, *Nothing To Envy*, 264.

¹⁴⁴ Demick, *Nothing To Envy*, 264–65.

disadvantage in a height-obsessed South Korean society.¹⁴⁵ He found that due to his short stature, he was ruled out as a potential marriage partner for the majority of the South Korean women. Lonely and desperate to find companionship, Hyuk suffered from resentment, frustration, depression, and terribly low self-esteem issues.

Hyuk's experience is not uncommon. A 2014 survey sponsored by the National Research Foundation of Korea found that South Koreans were only willing to embrace North Koreans inasmuch as the North Koreans did not seek unduly intimate or personal relationships with them.¹⁴⁶ Seven questions were asked to 403 participating adults, and the results were objectively indicative of social discrimination. When asked to answer on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree whether they (South Koreans) would accept North Koreans as South Korean citizens, 61.3% of respondents replied mostly-strongly agree.¹⁴⁷ However, when the relationship became slightly more familiar—accepting North Koreans as fellow workers—the percentage of those responding mostly-strongly agree dropped to 58.3%.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, when asked if they would accept North Koreans as neighbors and friends, the percentage of those replying yes dropped even further to 50.1% and 30.1% respectively.¹⁴⁹ Only 10.6% of participants agreed to accept North Koreans as business partners, highlighting the existence of an underlying layer of mistrust and foreignness between the two Korean peoples despite sharing same ethnic ties. Finally, most revealing of all, when asked if they would be willing to date, marry, or accept North Koreans as close kin by marriage, the percentage of respondents agreeing dropped sharply to 7.6%.¹⁵⁰

The results of this survey convey a very telling trend that South Koreans perceive North Koreans as second-class citizens, worthy of assistance and humanitarian aid, but not

¹⁴⁵ Demick, *Nothing To Envy*, 264.

¹⁴⁶ Kim, Yoo, and Chung, "Social Distance Towards the North Korean Refugees," 306.

¹⁴⁷ Kim, Yoo, and Chung, "Social Distance Towards the North Korean Refugees," 310–311.

¹⁴⁸ Kim, Yoo, and Chung, "Social Distance Towards the North Korean Refugees," 310–311.

¹⁴⁹ Kim, Yoo, and Chung, "Social Distance Towards the North Korean Refugees," 310–11.

¹⁵⁰ Kim, Yoo, and Chung, "Social Distance Towards the North Korean Refugees," 311. For a more in-depth analysis of the survey results, see pages 309–314.

of their friendship, companionship, partnership, or love. When at arm's length, South Koreans show willingness to overlook the differences and extend a helping hand. However, as soon as the relationship becomes too intimate, the widespread and well-entrenched southern culture of "strong prejudice and stereotyping of North Korea and its people" comes to light.¹⁵¹ In this regard, Park summarizes elegantly by saying that "the cosmetic differences associated with being North Korean—such as accent, dress, and self-presentation—have become symbolic markers of stigmatizing stereotypes."¹⁵² Consequently, "whether real or imagined, North Korean bodies are marked as smaller, foreign, and strange," therefore unsuitable for friendship, business partnership, dating, and marriage.¹⁵³

This conclusion is better articulated in a 2016 interview with a North Korean defector, Lee Ae Ran, the recipient of the 2010 International Women of Courage Award. Lee noted that "the major cultural difference between North and South Koreans has to do with hierarchy, whereby it is hard for South Koreans to see North Koreans as equals."¹⁵⁴ Though Son further adds that "this is not to say, that North Koreans are viewed as permanently in such a position: rather emphasis is placed on the need to level the hierarchy through education and socialization into the ways of the people of the South."¹⁵⁵ The problem with statements such as these is the expectation for North Korean defectors to conform to South Korea's societal norms and accept the Southerners' cultural values as their own. Furthermore, the indication that movement up the social hierarchy can only be achieved through education and conformity to the ways of the South—precisely areas where an average defector severely lags behind southern counterparts and struggles the most—further places the newly arrived North Koreans in an impossible position.

¹⁵¹ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 11.

¹⁵² Park, "The Gendered Contours of North Korean Migration," 220.

¹⁵³ Park, "The Gendered Contours of North Korean Migration," 220.

¹⁵⁴ Son, "Identity, Security and the Nation," 175.

¹⁵⁵ Son, "Identity, Security and the Nation," 175.

1. Education Gaps

In a society that demanded its population engage in daily struggles to meet their basic needs, North Koreans have acquired certain survival competition skills that leave them ill-equipped to compete in a capitalist South Korean society. The main culprit for this is the fundamental differences in the basic education system. Since the advent of globalization, foreign direct investment and expansion of South Korean companies abroad have made fluency in English a highly prized skill. Consequently, English is taught starting at a young age, often as a mandatory supplementary course in South Korean elementary schools; and average South Koreans, particularly those living in urban areas, are able to carry-on basic conversations in English. English loaner words such as *bus menu*, *virus*, *goalkeeper*, *internet*, *cellphone*, *project*, etc., are prevalent in many aspects of the South Korean society, and are commonly used to converse in subjects ranging from basic goods and services to sports, politics, and the economy.¹⁵⁶

If the German unification serves as an example, the potential for educational inequality between North and South Korean students post-unification remains high. The results of research conducted by Klein et al. concluded that inequality in education opportunity (IEO) in East Germany increased after the German reunification.¹⁵⁷ Contrary to popular belief, the education system in East Germany was less stratified than in West Germany due to the “FRG’s [Federal Republic of Germany, West Germany] highly selective early tracking system, in contrast to the GDR’s [German Democratic Republic, East Germany] more comprehensive school system.”¹⁵⁸ This is to say that while the West German education system sorted children at the age of 10–12 into three non-permeable categories, *Hauptschule* (lower secondary track), *Realschule* (intermediate secondary

¹⁵⁶ Based on direct observation. Also see, Rod Tyson, “English Loanwords in Korean: Patterns of Borrowing and Semitic Change,” *El Two Talk* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 29–36, <https://journals.uair.arizona.edu/index.php/AZSLAT/article/download/21459/21029>; Mira Oh, “Adaptation of English Complex Words into Korean,” *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 21, no. 3 (August 2012): 267–304, www.jstor.org/stable/41681138.

¹⁵⁷ Markus Klein, Katherin Barg, and Michael Kuhhirt, “Inequality of Educational Opportunity in East and West Germany: Convergence or Continued Differences?” *Society for Sociological Science* 6, (January 10, 2019): 31, <https://doi.org/10.15195/v6.a1>.

¹⁵⁸ Klein et al., “Inequality of Educational Opportunity in East and West Germany,” 9.

track), and *Gymnasium* (upper secondary track), the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) implemented a more homogenous, and compulsory education system.¹⁵⁹ Among the three tracks, only one, *Gymnasium*, led to an *Abitur* certificate, which allowed students to pursue tertiary education. On the other hand, all East German children attended the same comprehensive lower and intermediate track schools, “where low-achieving students experienced significant support and high-performing students received considerably less.”¹⁶⁰ Klein further notes that the GDR came closer to an educationally meritocratic ideal than the FRG because the ruling Socialist party “intervened against intergenerational reproduction by imposing meritocracy and explicit policies to reduce inequalities.”¹⁶¹

Post-German unification, however, Lothar de Maiziere, the prime minister of East Germany from April to October 1990, led the effort to adjust the East German education systems to West German standards.¹⁶² An education commission was established in May 1990 to oversee the unification of the two German education systems, but in the process, by 1994, over 13,000 East German university positions had been eliminated, 20,000 additional people lost their jobs, and 8,000 scholars saw their credentials discredited.¹⁶³ Nearly three decades on, Zawilska notes that “the consequences of the replacement of the academic elite are readily noticeable today [as] only three among 88 German university rectors come from the new federal states [i.e., former-East Germany].”¹⁶⁴ Klein concurs and adds that as East Germany adopted more and more of West Germany’s education system, decisions whether to attempt *Abitur* or not was “made earlier in the child’s life across all eastern states.”¹⁶⁵ Consequently, this premature placement of students onto one of three “tracks,” only one of which afforded the opportunity to pursue college education, severely disadvantaged East German students, who had been previously unexposed to the

¹⁵⁹ Klein et al., “Inequality of Educational Opportunity in East and West Germany,” 6–7.

¹⁶⁰ Klein et al., “Inequality of Educational Opportunity in East and West Germany,” 7.

¹⁶¹ Klein et al., “Inequality of Educational Opportunity in East and West Germany,” 8.

¹⁶² Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies?” 36.

¹⁶³ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies?” 36.

¹⁶⁴ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies?” 36.

¹⁶⁵ Klein et al., “Inequality of Educational Opportunity in East and West Germany,” 12.

West German education system. Accordingly, inequality of education opportunities rose sharply in East Germany in the 1990s in the immediate aftermath of German reunification.

In the context of Korean reunification, Kim Pil Ju, a North Korean who defected to South Korea in 2006, sheds some light into potential education inequalities that may arise in the event of integrated school systems, as current defector adjustment problems “offer a glimpse of the social integration challenges likely after unification.”¹⁶⁶ In a 2017 interview, when asked what the biggest challenge was in assimilating into South Korean society, Kim cited the language barrier resulting from English loan words as being among his top difficulties to overcome.¹⁶⁷ When Kim entered college, he recalls that this language barrier made successfully completing his college education extraordinarily difficult. In 2005 research conducted by the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (DCNKHR), 66 out of 126, or 52%, of the teenage defectors surveyed responded that English was by far their hardest subject in school.¹⁶⁸ This hardship continued into their college years, where the North Korean students who had taken the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scored 445, an average of 100 points below the South Korean average of 534.¹⁶⁹

The most glaring issue, however, was the reasoning the North Korean students gave for their below-average English skills. Though 27 out of 60 North Korean defectors who were interviewed acknowledged that finding employment in South Korea was the single biggest motivator for learning English, over half (31/60) stated that they could not afford to enroll in private English tutoring centers—quite ubiquitous in South Korea—or pay for extra tutoring sessions. Thus, “a vicious cycle is generated wherein the economic burden for private English education results in lower English proficiency which then becomes an

¹⁶⁶ O, “The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” 158.

¹⁶⁷ Pil Ju Kim, “What North Koreans Think of South Korea,” January 12, 2017, in Asian Boss, produced by Asian Boss, video, 21:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhmzpMP3bEE>.

¹⁶⁸ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 15.

¹⁶⁹ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 16.

obstacle to job acquisition. In turn, the low prospects for job acquisition create economic burdens.”¹⁷⁰

Hyun reports that the biggest issue facing teenage defectors is the difference between the north and south’s education systems.¹⁷¹ She claims that as students progress, their likelihood of falling behind and eventually dropping out of school increases exponentially: 0.2% dropout rate in elementary school, 2.9% in middle school, and 7.3% in high school. In total, by the time North Korean defector students reach high school graduation, close to 11% have been unsuccessful in completing their education.¹⁷² In a South Korean society that boasts a national 97% graduation rate, the highest graduation rate among OECD nations, the disparity between north and south’s education systems severely disadvantages North Koreans from thriving in a South Korean society where education is the building block and the determinant factor for everything else in life.¹⁷³ While it is probable that there could be more education equalization efforts after the unification to better accommodate the growing number of North Korean students, the existing gap between the North and South’s education systems leaves much ground for the North Korean students to make up if they are to survive in South Korean society.

According to the Ministry of Unification, the main reasons North Koreans frequently cite for this alarmingly high dropout rate include maladjustment to school, poor and unstable family conditions, and the Qualification Examination for Advancement to Higher State Education (or *kumjeonggosi*), a standardized test that is administered to those who did not complete high school.¹⁷⁴ Kim and Jang explain that the “*saeteomin* youth experience maladjustment because of the hiatus in their studies, the different content and pedagogy of South Korean education, and isolation from South Korean peers. These

¹⁷⁰ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 16.

¹⁷¹ “Galsooroak Neunen Talbook Chongsoneon [Increasing Numner of Teenage Defectors],” SBS News, News Video, 2:05, September 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoK-LZSHsM0&feature=share>.

¹⁷² “Galsooroak Neunen Talbook Chongsoneon [Increasing Numner of Teenage Defectors].”

¹⁷³ “Educational Statistics,” Korean Educational Statistics Service, Accessed September 6, 2018, <http://cesi.kedi.re.kr/eng/index>.

¹⁷⁴ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 15.

unfavorable conditions aggravate *saeteomin* youth drop-out rates, and sharply reduce the possibility that *saeteomin* children will live a better life in South Korean society.”¹⁷⁵

However, research by the DCNKHR gives slightly different reasons for the high rate of teenage defector dropouts: poor academic records, conflicts with friends, and being older than their classmates. Often, the number of years of North Korean schooling automatically determines a defector’s placement in South Korean schools.¹⁷⁶ As such, most defectors are placed in grades with much younger South Korean students, “triggering emotional discomfort, such as loss of pride and consequently maladjustment.”¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, North Korean students have trouble making friends, are often bullied, and most often choose other North Korean defectors as their friends and “most comfortable dialogue partners two-to-one over South Korean friends.”¹⁷⁸

Not all research is bleak, however. According to the Korean Educational Statistics Service, the collective North Korean dropout rate of primary, middle, and high school students combined was, quite surprisingly, just 2.0% in 2017.¹⁷⁹ Though slightly higher than the combined dropout rate of 0.71% among South Korean students, when compared to the North Korean dropout rate of nearly 11% in just 2008, this is still a remarkable improvement that signals some notable changes in the South Korean education system.¹⁸⁰ However, it is still important to note that this decline in dropout rate does not account for the relatively low overall attendance rate—number of days present in school—among North Korean students. *Saeteomin* may no longer be dropping completely out of school, but they are still ten times more likely to miss school days.¹⁸¹ In the past few years, the South Korean educators and policy makers have started to make appropriate adjustments

¹⁷⁵ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 21.

¹⁷⁶ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 16.

¹⁷⁷ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 16.

¹⁷⁸ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers?” 16.

¹⁷⁹ Korean Educational Statistics Service, “Educational Statistics.”

¹⁸⁰ “Statistics: Primary and Secondary Education,” Ministry of Education, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://english.moe.go.kr/sub/info.do?m=050101&page=050101&num=1&s=english>.

¹⁸¹ Kim and Jang, “Aliens Among Brothers,” 15.

and changes in policy to better accommodate the defectors. This is evident in the ROK Ministry of Education’s identification of five “main tasks” to reform South Korean schools. Even though these key policies changes were not undertaken specifically to combat the challenges that North Korean students face in schools, at least three out of the five main taskers directly address the North Korean students’ needs.

First, the ministry’s “Education that Leaves no Child Behind” initiative “endeavors to achieve equal opportunity” by providing educational support and after-school programs for students with disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁸² It further identifies North Korean students, students from multi-cultural families (children with at least one immigrant parent), and those with disabilities as prime targets of financial aid. Second, in an effort to ease the financial burden of education, South Korea enacted the Public Education Normalization Promotion Act, which “prohibits teaching student to a test, solely to help students receive a high score on school assessments and university entrance exams.”¹⁸³ The legislation further aims to discourage the rampant use of expensive private tutoring teachers/centers by preventing teaching of content that requires supplementary learning beyond the school setting. Finally, to provide a safer school environment to address bullying and rising teenage depression and suicides, the ministry has pledged to end child abuse, prioritize child safety, and prevent school violence. Cumulatively, these three MOE policy initiatives are indisputably a step in the right direction to better accommodate *saeteomin* youth, and prepare for a potential Korean unification in which the South could see a significant increase in North Korean youths.

2. Labor Market Discrimination

By age fifteen, mandatory state education—the content and quality of which remains dubious at best—is complete, and North Korean students begin applying to high schools.¹⁸⁴ As selection is based on the student’s *songbun*, the majority find themselves

¹⁸² “Policies and Programs: Major Tasks,” Ministry of Education, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://english.moe.go.kr/sub/info.do?m=040101&s=english>.

¹⁸³ Ministry of Education, “Policies and Programs: Major Tasks.”

¹⁸⁴ Demick, *Nothing To Envy*, 29.

rejected from continuing their education and assigned to a work unit.¹⁸⁵ Rare exceptions are made for extraordinary or unique talent, but for the majority of the North Korean population, a job assignment at age fifteen means a lifetime of strenuous work in a textile/manufacturing factory, the coal mines, or the like. As such, this leaves many North Koreans with low value-chain skills that leave them ill-suited to thrive in a service sector-oriented South Korean economy.

Bidet cites the source of main labor market discrimination as exclusion from regular jobs, meaning, that the “relatively well-paid, stable employment with good working conditions and promotion prospects” are not being offered to North Koreans.¹⁸⁶ Rather, North Koreans are being subjugated to what he calls secondary market jobs that are *dirty*, *difficult*, and *dangerous* (3D).¹⁸⁷ Amid the less than 4% unemployment rate among the South Korean population, 30–40% of the 32,000 North Koreans defectors currently living in South Korea are unemployed.¹⁸⁸ When they have a job, North Koreans tend to fill unsecured, daily, or temporary jobs, with their length of stay at any particular job being much shorter than that of South Korean workers. Despite having equivalent experience levels and comparable educational backgrounds, North Koreans’ wages are much lower than those of South Koreans filling similar positions.¹⁸⁹ Even in the low-skill job market, South Korean laborers earn wages that are 1.5-2.5 times that of North Korean defectors.¹⁹⁰ On average, income remains very low for North Korean defectors, with more than 95% percent of them earning wages that are below the national average.¹⁹¹ Approximately 80% of North Korean defectors need social welfare or government assisted funds to get by, and

¹⁸⁵ Demick, *Nothing To Envy*, 29.

¹⁸⁶ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 163.

¹⁸⁷ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 164.

¹⁸⁸ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 160.

¹⁸⁹ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 161–64.

¹⁹⁰ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 162–63.

¹⁹¹ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 163.

“those who are employed are involved in part-time employments, physical labors, or service type employments.”¹⁹²

In some aspects, North Koreans are being forced into the secondary labor market through discriminatory practices; but in other cases, they are resigned to 3D jobs because those are simply the only jobs they are qualified to perform. The former is well-documented through defector testimony, surveys, and reports like the 2014 ASAN Institute report on the resettlement challenges of young North Korean refugees. According to this report, “North Korean refugees in the workplace report having similar experience of social discrimination by their co-workers and superiors.”¹⁹³ For example, an employer who hired a North Korean defector “expressed fear that his employee might kill others if provoked emotionally.”¹⁹⁴ Above all, the biggest issue hindering socio-economic integration seems to be “the problem of trust among defectors and between defectors and South Koreans,” in which “mutual trust” between the two groups seems almost non-existent.¹⁹⁵ This is particularly evident in the pigeonholing characterization of northern workers in southern society. While North Korean defectors generally cite heartlessness and hardship “accepting an environment in which a person is judged only by his money” as the main challenges of their labor integration, Southerners describe North Koreans as “impolite, selfish, and prone to lies and exaggerations about their past.”¹⁹⁶ O further adds that:

Many North Korean defectors also face prejudice from some South Koreans, who perceive the defectors as socialists who are dependent, passive, lazy, and selfish. Still other South Koreans are simply too busy, focused on their own lives, to show much interest.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 160–161.

¹⁹³ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 11.

¹⁹⁴ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 11.

¹⁹⁵ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 170.

¹⁹⁶ Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise,” 120, 124.

¹⁹⁷ O, “The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” 161.

The accumulation of anti-North Korean defector sentiments such as these culminates in defectors being treated as “second class citizens,” and being overwhelmed “by their new surroundings [in which they] find it difficult to compete.”¹⁹⁸

Even if we were to examine more closely the latter factor—the defectors’ unsuitability for anything but 3D jobs—behind the shunting of North Koreans into the secondary job market, “the strong homophily of social relations [that is] stressed as a distinctive feature of social organization in South Korea, where one observes a high tendency to generate social groups gathering persons with similar characteristics,” perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty and second-class citizenship among North Koreans.¹⁹⁹ Harkening back to the hierarchical and golden-track nature of South Korean society, this results in what Bidet calls “a pattern of primary solidarity, such that interpersonal relations revolve around persons with similar background with regard to education, geographical origin, or kinship.”²⁰⁰ Therefore, almost undoubtedly, the very nature of South Korean society makes it even more difficult for “North Korean defectors, to access resources and achieve socio-economic integration.”²⁰¹ Furthermore, this “homophily” of South Korea’s social organization can explain why poverty in South Korea tends to continuously “advantage members of advantaged groups and disadvantage members of disadvantaged groups.”²⁰²

In discussing the potential for heightening labor market discrimination post-unification, current defector experiences are likely a microcosm of what is to come. This is particularly true as the already saturated South Korean labor market experiences an influx of northern migrants competing for employment. The ASAN Institute aptly notes that:

Even after taking into account the inevitable cultural misunderstandings when dealing with recently arrived North Korean refugees, South Korea’s

¹⁹⁸ O, “The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” 162.

¹⁹⁹ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 168.

²⁰⁰ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 168.

²⁰¹ Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 168.

²⁰² Bidet, “Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants,” 168.

strong prejudice and stereotyping of North Korea and its people are widespread and well entrenched.²⁰³

Fear and prejudice such as these translate poorly to the labor market as South Koreans prove less willing to hire North Korean defectors when given a choice.²⁰⁴

However, the most recent 2018 Korean Hana Foundation shows some promise in the projecting the future integration of North Korean defectors into the South Korean society. Surveying 2710 defectors living in the South, the survey found that employment rose by 3% from 57% in 2017 to 60% in 2018.²⁰⁵ Of the employed defectors, most “had been at their jobs for an average of 27 months in 2018, up two months from the previous year.”²⁰⁶ And among those who received wages, “64% were considered regular [salaried] employees in 2018,” up 7% from 2017.²⁰⁷ Additionally, average wages also increased for North Korean defectors, “with the gross income for defector households rising from USD\$23,530 [in 2017], to USD\$24,830 [in 2018].”²⁰⁸ According to Lim, “the unemployment rate of North Korean defectors in South Korea is decreasing and the gap with [South Korean counterparts] narrowing.”²⁰⁹ Though still far from equal, compared to 2003 KINU survey results in which “40% of defectors [had] a monthly income below 500,000₩ [USD\$450] and more than 85% below 1,000,000₩ [USD\$900], [while] 10% of South Korean households [had] a [monthly] income below 450,000₩ and 20% below

²⁰³ Sung and Go, *Resettling in South Korea*, 11.

²⁰⁴ Kim, Yoo, and Chung, “Social Distance Towards the North Korean Refugees,” 305–314. Only 10.6% of survey participants accepted North Koreans as business partners, highlighting the existence of an underlying layer of mistrust and foreignness between the two Korean peoples despite sharing same ethnic ties.

²⁰⁵ Jin-man Lee, “Survey: North Korean Defectors in South Korea Fared Better Economically Last Year,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 25, 2019, 1, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/nk-defector-stats-2018-04252019101211.html>.

²⁰⁶ Lee, “Survey: North Korean Defectors in South Korea Fared Better Economically Last Year,” 2.

²⁰⁷ Lee, “Survey: North Korean Defectors in South Korea Fared Better Economically Last Year,” 2.

²⁰⁸ Lee, “Survey: North Korean Defectors in South Korea Fared Better Economically Last Year,” 2.

²⁰⁹ Lee, “Survey: North Korean Defectors in South Korea Fared Better Economically Last Year,” 2.

1,100,000~~W~~, improvements have been made in the past decade towards economic equality.²¹⁰

Though the recent improvements in the defectors' economic conditions signal good news for the prospective labor integration of northern migrants into the South Korean work force, the issue still remains that the organization of the South Korean society makes it very difficult for North Koreans to penetrate the social divide. Not only that, the gap between the economic conditions of North and South Koreans, though narrowing, still remains fairly wide. A 60% employment rate among northern defectors in 2018 is hardly impressive when put into perspective with a 96.2% employment rate among South Koreans.²¹¹ And an increase of USD\$1,300 in the defectors' household income (USD\$24,830) pales in comparison to USD\$40,464 gross income among South Korean workers.²¹² While indications that North Korean defectors fared better economically in 2018 bodes well for the future, the ingrained South Korean pattern of strong social homophily that naturally excludes North Koreans, as well as widespread southern preconceptions and negative stereotyping, are causes for legitimate concern when contemplating the labor integration of the two Korean societies, particularly given the current competitiveness of the South Korean labor market.

²¹⁰ Bidet, "Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrant," 163.

²¹¹ "OECD Data: Korea, South," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019, <https://data.oecd.org/korea.htm>.

²¹² Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "OECD Data: Korea, South."

V. SOUTH-NORTH MIGRATION AND “CARPETBAGGING” BEHAVIOR

This thesis approached Korean reunification, by and large, from a South Korean point of view, considering what happen if North Koreans intrude on the South Korean way of life. This approach was taken for several reasons, the most pressing of which was the dearth of primary and secondary sources available on North Korea. Given this assumption of reunification under Seoul’s terms, the scope of this thesis did not allow for a complete and thorough exploration of potential social issues from a North Korean perspective. This short chapter examines one: northern migration by opportunistic South Korean entrepreneurs and businesses.

Existing literature on this topic identifies opposing arguments surrounding the development of northern infrastructure, specifically as it pertains to mining of rare earth minerals.²¹³ On one hand, optimists about post-reunification inter-Korean mining operations claim that extraction of mineral resources has the potential to be mutually beneficial insofar the North receives help from the South to build proper infrastructure, acquire modern mining equipment and technology, and build reliable and sustainable sources of power. South Korea would similarly benefit by gaining an internal supply of mineral resources crucial to sustaining its domestic industries, whose revenues make up half of the South Korean GDP. On the other hand, cynics argue that North Korea’s rich minerals have the potential to attract carpetbaggers from South Korea seeking to advance their capitalist interests, particularly since “South Korea depends on imports of mineral commodities from overseas due to its own poor supply of mineral resources.”²¹⁴ Thus, North Korea should be wary of its vulnerability to potential exploitation.

²¹³ Existing literature on this topic include: Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kyung Soo Choi, “The Mining Industry of North Korea,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 23, no. 2 (June 2011): 211–30, <http://kida.re.kr>; W. J. Chung, “A Study on Investment Potential for Development and Manufacturing of Mineral Resources in North Korea,” Policy Issue Paper (Ulsan, Korea: Korea Energy Economics Institute, February 23, 2015), <http://www.keei.re.kr/>; Chung H. Lee, “A Note on Unifying Two Korean Economies,” *Seoul Journal of Economics* 7, no. 1 (1994): 77–89, <http://www.sje.ac.kr/>.

²¹⁴ Choi, “The Mining Industry of North Korea,” 227.

General consensus exists, however, that developing infrastructure in the northern half would have lasting benefits for both Koreas.²¹⁵ However, the literature does not fully address the Northerners' potential vulnerability to exploitation by southern businesspeople and industries. Thus, in an effort to give due-diligence attention to what could happen if South Koreans intrude on the northern way of life, and to suggest a topic for further consideration by future researchers, this thesis will now briefly consider the subject of "carpetbagging" behavior among South Koreans capitalists, businesses, and industries post-reunification.

When the Korean peninsula was effectively partitioned post World War II, the south ended up with the bulk of the peninsula's arable land and milder weather. The majority of the northern half was perceived to be covered with fairly inhospitable granite mountains until the 1980s, when discovery of precious minerals sparked the initial heavy industrial development. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, "North Korea's immense energy potential has pushed several South Korean conglomerates, including KORES [Korea Resources Corporation], to invest in mining projects in the North and to consider the development of infrastructures to facilitate rare earth exploitation."²¹⁶ More recently, reports from the North Korea Resources Institute, based in Seoul, indicated that North Korea was sitting atop US\$6-10 trillion worth of untapped precious and rare earth minerals. Over 200 different types of minerals are distributed across 80% of the country, and North Korea boasts large deposits of some of the world's most precious minerals.²¹⁷ Based on these estimates, this could mean that the value of North Korea's mineral resources is approximately 21 times that of South Korea.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Lankov, *The Real North Korea*; Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea"; Chung, "A Study on Investment Potential for Development and Manufacturing of Mineral Resources in North Korea"; Lee, "A Note on Unifying Two Korean Economies". Each provide both sides of the inter-Korean mining gains/carpetbagging argument with Lankov and Lee taking a more pessimistic stance, and Chung and Choi taking a more optimistic approach.

²¹⁶ Patricia Schouker, "Billions in the Ground: The Race to Harvest North Korea's Rare Earth Reserves," *The National Interest*, April 1, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/billions-ground-race-harvest-north-koreas-rare-earth-reserves-50137>.

²¹⁷ Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea," 212.

²¹⁸ "NK Mineral Resources May Be Worth \$9.7tr."

In the event of reunification, both North and South Korea would have much to gain by resuming mining operations. Inter-Korean mining cooperation would increase North Korea's mineral production and catapult its economic growth, while South Korean heavy industries would gain valuable resources and cease importing often-overpriced minerals to sustain their operations.²¹⁹ Since 2001, when inter-Korean mining operations first began, foreign companies from China, Japan, United Kingdom, and the United States have engaged in 25 mining projects in North Korea.²²⁰ This inter-Korean mining relationship continued until 2010, when a steady increase in North Korean nuclear and military activity fractured the North-South relationship and halted joint mining operations. Since then, North Korea has attempted to sustain its mining operations, but insufficient electricity, antiquated equipment, restricted financial assistance, and poorly maintained facilities have led to a drastic downfall.²²¹ Additionally, foreign investors have been thoroughly spooked by and increasingly frustrated with their inability to establish independently operating mining facilities, further diminishing an already slow stream of foreign investment.²²²

This is precisely where South Korea can help by spearheading a post-reunification revival of inter-Korean mining operations. Undoubtedly, resumption of joint mining operations would spark South Korean interests in investing in northern development. Considering that North Korea's large mineral reserves are spread out across 80% of the country, development of the mining sector as a whole would mean development across multiple provinces, particularly in areas far away from Pyongyang that have historically been overlooked.²²³ Additionally, energy shortages, unreliable power grids, and antiquated equipment and technology are some of the key challenges hindering North Korean mineral production.²²⁴ As a leader in the world's technology sector, South Korea can help restructure the north's power system and construct large-scale hydroelectric

²¹⁹ Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea," 225–27.

²²⁰ Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea," 212.

²²¹ Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea," 227.

²²² Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea," 212.

²²³ Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea," 211.

²²⁴ Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea," 212.

plants. In return, South Korea would be securing a valuable supply of minerals that would effectively eliminate its current reliance on overseas mineral imports and thus drastically reduce production costs.²²⁵

South Korean conglomerates known colloquially as *chaebols* dominate a fair share of the world's technology and innovation market. North Korea's untapped mineral resources may prove to be exceptionally alluring to companies like Hyundai, Samsung, LG, and SK, who rely almost exclusively on imported minerals to produce semi-conductors, an essential component of majority of these conglomerates' exports. An internal source of minerals would eliminate the *chaebol's* vulnerability to changes in international resources prices, and directly investing in North Korean mining projects would ensure that "an increment of [the] international resources price would return to [the] South Korean companies."²²⁶ Thus, it is no surprise that the *chaebols* of South Korea have a vested interest in seeking inter-Korean mining operations post-reunification and would be agreeable to funding the initial investment costs.

However, due to North Korea's weak organization and the lucrative nature of its minerals, it is prudent to be aware of any potential influx of South Korean carpetbaggers into North Korea who may seek to exploit its resources. "Carpetbagging" is a term derived from the American Civil War that carries an underlying tone of exploitation and greed. It refers to victorious Northerners viewed as descending on the war-ravaged Confederate States with carpet bags filled with cash to bribe and buy up plantations, natural resources, and cheap labor.²²⁷ This term fits comfortably within the Korean inter-mining context because of the similar potential for North Koreans to be exploited by South Koreans viewed as greedy and capitalistic. Lankov warns that it will be more necessary to protect the Northerners from predatory southern businesses.²²⁸ This claim is supported by the

²²⁵ Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea," 212–13.

²²⁶ Chung, "A Study on Investment Potential," 14.

²²⁷ Dennis P Halpin, "Korea and America, North and South: Preventing Carpetbagging Exploiters, Rampant Discrimination, Historical Whitewashes All Look post-Unification Challenges," *NK News Org*, March 23, 2015, <https://www.nknews.org/2015/03/korea-and-america-north-and-south/>.

²²⁸ Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, 266.

unfortunate fact that one in five North Korean defectors is victimized by fraud, Ponzi schemes, or other shady business practices, a rate approximately 40% higher than the national South Korean average.²²⁹ Lankov further notes that post-reunification, North Korea “may find itself under the control of opportunistic Kim-era ex-bureaucrats, puppets of Beijing, or South Korean carpetbaggers,” and should therefore begin early training of its administrators, engineers, managers, and scholars.²³⁰

A 2015 study on investment potential for development and manufacturing of mineral resources in North Korea brings up a salient point on the potential division of labor, with South Koreans as management and North Koreans as labor. This argument of division of labor has merit, particularly because this split between northern workers versus southern management would serve as yet another symbol of the societal divide that characterizes the poorer and therefore apparently inferior North, and the richer, superior South. Post-reunification, stark differences in education levels and standards of living will be transparent enough without yet another marker of the Korean social divergence. If the southern capitalist carpetbaggers rush north to privatize mining industries, then Northerners will see their role diminished to mere low-skilled laborers even in their own former-country, while Southerners will be reinforced of their identity as the better of the two Korean groups. Consequently, just as it was the case in unified Germany when Easterners resented Westerners for their greater successes, we can foresee the “possibility of economically prosperous southern capitalists becoming an object of [northern] envy and hatred.”²³¹ This hatred and envy, coupled with the perception of being exploited, has the potential to boil over into social unrest and increased social friction and certainly make social integration challenging.

²²⁹ Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, 268.

²³⁰ Andrei Lankov, “The North Korean Paradox and the Subversive Truth,” *American Enterprise Institute*, March 3, 2009, <http://www.aei.org/publication/the-north-korean-paradox-and-the-subversive-truth/>.

²³¹ Lee, “A Note on Unifying Two Korean Economies,” 83.

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VI. CONCLUSION

For North and South Koreans to truly reach social parity post-reunification, adequate preparation before, and realistic expectations afterwards, are essential. In the aftermath of German unification, “the politicians focused primarily on adjusting the political, administrative and economic institutions of East Germany to Western standards,” while disregarding the cultural and social differences between the two German societies.²³² In doing so, East and West Germany failed to fully socially integrate, creating the long-lasting social tension, sense of foreignness, and “phantom wall” that still divide the two German societies almost three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall.²³³

Assuming a peaceful Korean reunification in which North Korea is absorbed into South Korea, this thesis aimed to bridge a gap in existing literature, which focuses almost exclusively on potential political, security, and economic implications of reunification. In examining the likely social implications of such an event, this thesis has argued that despite similarities in culture, language, historical legacies, and, most importantly, shared ethnic identities, two sets of social issues—North-South population migration and pervasive discrimination—have the potential to be even more divisive and socially costly than similar issues experienced during and after German unification. Furthermore, this thesis has found that existing issues within South Korean society, such as infrastructure limitations, socio-spatial inequalities, labor crowding and competition, and social discrimination, are likely to multiply, intensify, and worsen in the event of a complete integration of the two Korean societies.

This thesis was organized to analyze the social implications of a potential Korean reunification from a South Korean perspective due to the sparsity of credible and verifiable sources from North Korea. Accordingly, estimations and conclusions were drawn by analyzing the existing trends in South Korean society and taking into account the German

²³² Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies?” 16.

²³³ Zawilska-Florczuk and Ciechanowicz, “One Country, Two Societies?” 16; Connolly, “German Reunification 25 Years On.”

unification example. As defector experiences shed light on existing social issues that could worsen with complete social integration, this thesis paid close attention to the adjustment problems that current North Korean defectors face in South Korea, which “offer a glimpse of the social integration challenges likely after unification.”²³⁴

The thesis first introduced shared ethnic identity as the strongest rationale behind the push for reunification, as shared ethnic roots remain the foundation for what little link remains between North and South Korea. In exploring the historicity of this shared ethnic identity, this thesis found that the intra-South Korean national identity is evolving, particularly among the younger generations, such that South Koreans are increasingly rejecting the notion of ethnic identity and ethnic nationalism as the glue that unites the two Koreas. In doing so, this thesis has suggested that if ethnic nationalism continues to fade among South Koreans, then the primary driver of reunification could face real challenges as the two Korean societies continue to diverge.

This thesis then examined the likelihood of North-South migration and population movement in a unified Korea. It detailed the potential consequences of a sudden influx of North Koreans into South Korean society and found that due to the changes in defector demographics since the early 2000s, with current average defectors economically motivated with little political utility, a full-fledged social integration of North Koreans with similar backgrounds, education levels, skill sets, and motivations could see a growth of the labor crowding effect, and exacerbation of infrastructure limitations and socio-spatial inequality.

This thesis next explored growing social discrimination and the probable emergence of a new class system, in which future North Korean migrants might be rendered second-class citizens, much like current defectors living in South Korea. As was the case post-German unification, this thesis argued that the growing social distance between North and South Koreans can be attributed to differences in their respective cultural and societal values, which leave defectors unable to adjust to or accept a southern society in which “social mobility and economic opportunities are connected to family

²³⁴ O, “The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” 158.

background, education level, social standing, and school ties.”²³⁵ In addition, the south’s strong social homophily makes it unlikely that future North Korean migrants will be immediately successful in integrating into South Korean society.

Finally, this thesis briefly considered what could happen if South Koreans intrude on the northern way of life. Analyzing from a North Korean perspective, this thesis examined one potential repercussion of South-North migration in a unified Korea: potential rise of “carpetbagging” behavior among South Korean businesspeople, entrepreneurs, and industries. While exploring the likely mutual gains from revitalizing inter-Korean mining operations and stimulating southern investment to rebuild northern infrastructure, this thesis also addressed the Northerners’ vulnerability to exploitation and the possibility for South-North migration to perpetuate the image of North Koreans as labor, and South Koreans as “possessors, givers, and cultural superiors.”²³⁶

The premise of shared ethnic homogeneity as the driving force for Korean unification creates a false sense of unity. North and South Koreans have been separated longer than East and West Germans has been, and under less amicable, less porous, and ever widening economic conditions, and so we can expect the social integration of the two Koreas to be just as challenging, if not more so, than that following German unification. As such, when discussing Korean reunification, the potential social implications should be considered on equal footing with more often-debated security and economic implications.

²³⁵ O, “The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” 162.

²³⁶ Kim, Y. Y., “Negotiating Cultures and Identities,” 1024.

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